

FA'A-SAMOA – THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF SAMOAN SPIRITUALITY:  
A THEOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLORATION  
FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

A Dissertation  
presented to  
the Faculty of the  
Claremont School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

by  
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May 2007

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under the direction of his Faculty Committee  
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has been presented to and accepted  
by the Faculty of the  
Claremont School of Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

### FA'A-SAMOA – THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF SAMOAN SPIRITUALITY: A THEOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLORATION FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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Fa'a-Samoa (cultural values) and spirituality (religious values) are inseparable. Samoan spirituality is non-existent without Fa'a-Samoa. The charisma of Fa'a-Samoa validates the reality of Samoan spirituality. The origin of this relationship is in the Samoan ideology, in which they find it more fitting to establish relationships with the transcendent through a visible metaphor called "Fa'a-Samoa." Using the Samoan community as a case study, this dissertation explores the motivational dynamics of Fa'a-Samoa for spiritual formation and nurture.

Utilizing the supports of grounded theory and the cultural hermeneutic approach, this dissertation illustrates Fa'a-Samoa as the epistemology of Samoan spirituality. It explores the effect of Fa'a-Samoa on the physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being of Samoans. Fa'a-Samoa as spiritual empowerment is significant to Samoans through their views of aspects of Samoan ideology.

Secondly, this dissertation illustrates Fa'a-Samoa as an agent of Samoan religious and cultural elements defined as life-giving principles and discipline. Believing in unity between Fa'a-Samoa and structure contributes to the coherent meaning of Samoan spirituality including nature, symbolism, and cultural patterns of their use.

Thirdly, this study portrays Fa'a-Samoa as a reliable form of theology, education, and psychology for the Samoan Christians. Spiritual well-being as the ultimate goals is

the emphasis of Fa'a-Samoa. Ultimately, emotional freedom, mental health, and spiritual happiness is what the Samoan known as spirituality—living well and doing well in both one's relationship with God and others. The greatest happiness consists in the revelation of God which involves not only the person himself/herself but the culture in which he/she lives and the society to which he/she belongs.

Group discussions and sample surveys were used to gather information about their attitudes and perspectives about Samoan spirituality; and pertaining to their own view of the psycho-theological culture and religious situation of Fa'a-Samoa. It was estimated that the participants would have an increased sense of spirituality as a result of their practicing of Fa'a-Samoa; and an increased sense of spiritual well-being with exposure to aspects of Fa'a-Samoa aimed to provide spirituality. The findings showed that Fa'a-Samoa—history, attitudes, philosophy, custom and tradition have a huge impact on Samoan spirituality.

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## Acknowledgement

I am profoundly grateful to God for the gift of wisdom and inspiration. *Fa'afetai i le Atua* – Thank you God.

My family has been a great part of my success. To my beloved parents, Niuatoa and Taisea, you have taught, disciplined, and raised me to be who I am today. To my wife's parents, Lefao and Suifou, thank you so much for your support. To all of my family, *fa'afetai tele*.

To the members of my church at South Los Angeles, it was a joyful experience to work and fellowship with you all. My pastor and wife, Dr. Ioane and Ruth Mailo, thank you so much for your financial assistance and spiritual guidance. *Fa'afetai*.

Thanks to all of the Samoan chiefs, orators, and pastoral colleagues for the wealth of the Fa'a-Samoa you shared for this project. This dissertation is not an individual achievement, but an end result of the many friendly dialogue and Fa'a-Samoa discussion with you. *Fa'afetai*.

Thank you to my dissertation committee, Dr. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Dr. Andy Dreitcer, and Dr. Stephen Kim. The affluence of your feedbacks and ideas have encouraged me to put in written form and express in “theological-talk” the richness of the Fa'a-Samoa in regards to Samoan spirituality. My friend and colleague, Dr. Ho Kim, thank you for suggesting various “theological concepts” and ideas reflected in this work.

My children's love and support have been constant. Through these words, I want my son Benedict and daughters, Beatrice, Brigitte, Berniece, and Beverley to know yet again that I continue everyday in thanks to God for you all. *Fa'amanuia le Atua ia te outou*.

I give thanks especially to Taiai (Tai), my dear wife and companion, for her patience and spiritual support to whom this project is dedicated and with whom life together is a continuing joy and blessing. *Viia le Atua*.

## INTRODUCTION

The development of spirituality in the Samoan community is critically important. The Samoan church has acknowledged that failure to understand the essence and purpose of Fa'a-Samoa may cause the Samoan Christians to be incapable of fully comprehending the spiritual dynamics of social and religious life of Samoa.<sup>1</sup> Fa'a-Samoa—the epistemology of Samoan spirituality—is the prism through which the profound and vibrant meaning of spirituality is inherently embedded. The teaching and practicing of the Fa'a-Samoa for spiritual empowerment is something fundamentally needed in the Samoan church. Lack of teaching Fa'a-Samoa is one of the major reasons many Samoans left the church for other religions to help fill the void of their spiritual hunger.<sup>2</sup>

According to Gallup and Castelli, one of the reasons why people leave the church is that they want deeper spiritual meaning.<sup>3</sup> This statement points to my claim that the majority of Samoan Christians believed that churches are too concerned with internal organizational issues and not concerned with spiritual matters. They strongly believe that the Fa'a-Samoa is significantly relevant to the nurture of their faith in God.

Fa'a-Samoa is the heartbeat of living and practicing of Samoan spirituality. It is a cultural collage that unifies Samoan experience, wisdom and education regarding how we can assist others in developing maturity in faith and cultivate our faith in order to truly

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<sup>1</sup> Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa (CCCAS), Annual Conference, 17-18 July 2005. Though this issue was openly discussed in 2005, it had surfaced in church discussion in the past.

<sup>2</sup> Fa'a-Samoa, in essence, is a moral constitution selflessly designed for the benefit of all Samoa. It is a way of living harmoniously and faithfully in reciprocal relationships according to the principles and set norms of the community; it is not self-centered but community-oriented. Fa'a-Samoa is a construction of both religio-cultural beliefs and aesthetic implications of Samoan ideology. It is an art of life-giving images for Samoan spiritual empowerment.

<sup>3</sup> George Gallup Jr., and Jim Castelli, The People's Religion: American Faith in the 90's (New York: MacMillan, 1989), 45.

reconcile our souls to the everlasting life of the living God. God's grace and presence are given to us in a distinctive way. This way, according to the Samoans, is Fa'a-Samoa.

In this study, Fa'a-Samoa serves as epistemology for Samoan spirituality in several capacities. First, it serves as *metaphor*—a symbolic exposition of spirituality inherited in the traditional cultural and religious norms of Samoa. Second, it serves as *code of conduct*—an orderly system to guide and engineer Samoan manner and attitude towards self and others. Third, because the Samoan faith in God is a fusion of their cultural and religious values, Fa'a-Samoa serves as *Christian life* for the Samoans. Living a righteous life based on the life of Jesus is the goal of Fa'a-Samoa. Fourth, it serves as *pedagogy*—cultural and religious activity to help Samoans make sense of their faith in God and to help us experience the sacred, that which is most central and essential to our lives—for ourselves. Lastly, Fa'a-Samoa serves as *psychotherapy*—a therapeutic dimension of Samoan culture fostering personal relationships which in turn further the well-being of the mind-body-soul.

These five capacities serve as epistemology and anthology to bring greater clarity and depth to the understanding of Samoan spirituality. They are inclusive enough to embrace both the nature of Samoan spirituality and the diversity of spiritualities that actually exist; serve as a mental prism for the Samoans to see through their Fa'a-Samoa spiritual affirmations of the living God. One cannot speak literally of God because God is transcendent and human knowledge is limited. Our affirmations of God, therefore, partake of metaphor and pedagogy based on the life of Christ, and will help us perceive spirituality as the love of God.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For example, calling God "Father" or saying that God is love uses categories from human

There is clear evidence that suggest the importance of Samoan spirituality that is rooted in Fa'a-Samoa moral and ethical sense of life lived under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This is obvious in the effort of many Samoan churches trying to practice and stresses Fa'a-Samoa in the church educational ministry.<sup>5</sup> Many have acknowledged the importance of maintaining Fa'a-Samoa.<sup>6</sup> The distinctive of Fa'a-Samoa for the Samoan ministry also proved to be relevant to the life of Samoans in the United States. Without a coherent understanding of what and how Fa'a-Samoa can help empower the life of Samoan Christians and improve educational ministry to build community of faith, our best intentions as Samoan religious educators may only make matters worse.

### Problem of Samoan Spirituality

This study deals with the life experiences of Samoan Christians and attempts to introduce a proper religious education for spiritual formation in the Samoan church today. This effort is in part complete by reconstructing, reconceptualizing, and revaluing of Fa'a-Samoa as the foundational paradigm of inspiration and motivation for the Samoans in their effort to nourish their spirituality. The religious and cultural influence of Fa'a-Samoa to the Samoans was the door to the investigation of spiritual formation as an important life-giving image and guidance for the Samoan church; it has been the inspiring factor and “prime mover” in the redeveloping of the Samoan educational

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experience to speak of what transcends. As in other cultures, a Samoan can only make sense of the reality of God's love by utilizing cultural and religious values of Fa'a-Samoa.

<sup>5</sup> Revitalizing of Fa'a-Samoa education in church curriculum was the major issue discussed in the 2006 General Assembly of the Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa. 16-23 July, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Samoan *fai'feau* have acknowledged that the majority of Samoan-Americans lack speaking the Samoan language and have no knowledge of Fa'a-Samoa. They have agreed that Fa'a-Samoa programs should be integrated in church curricula activities to help the Samoans learn and practice Fa'a-Samoa. Until this is done, Fa'a-Samoa will find little value in the lives of the Samoan-Americans.



ministry and Christian identity.

Unfortunately, this inspiring dynamic of Samoan Christians in embracing Fa'a-Samoa is slowly evaporating. Because of the vibrant capacity of Fa'a-Samoa and of how it plays a major part in the spirituality of the Samoan people and therefore a motivational force, this study will reconsider the significance of Fa'a-Samoa animated values that are fundamental in religious education, spiritual formation, and seek to find ways of empowering the Samoan spiritual life. Neglecting of these Fa'a-Samoa values as the spirit of Samoan Christian values and life is the root of feeble Samoan spirituality.

The rise of religious and cultural pluralism has resulted in a proliferation of Fa'a-Samoa religious and cultural practice. In the American context, Fa'a-Samoa practices such as *lotu afiafi* (evening prayer), *saofa'i* (chiefly initiation), *soalaupule* (sharing of authority), *ifoga* (act of reconciliation) and other Samoan religious and cultural events do not seem to have anything distinctive about them.<sup>7</sup> The essence and significance of these Samoan cultural and religious practices has lost. The supremacy of the American culture in the life of the Samoans has meant that there is little continuity between being a Samoan and being an American. Fa'a-Samoa virtues, being propagated and proliferated by the American virtues, were placed in a moratorium stage until a future return to Samoa. This phenomenon has made it easier for distinctively Fa'a-Samoa practices to be overlooked. It is difficult to think of the Samoan church and community as unique when

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<sup>7</sup> In Samoa, these practices are very important, especially the *tapuaiga afiafi*. *Tapuaiga afiafi* is regarded as significant religious norm and practice of Samoa. Although each village has its own way of monitoring and enforcing *tapuaiga afiafi*, it is highly observed in Samoa. For example, in the village of Olosega, the bell rings at about 6:00 p.m. to inform the villagers to enter their homes for evening prayers. The second bell rings at about 6:05 p.m. and warns anyone outside to enter their homes. This curfew is enforced by the village *aumaga* (group of untitled men), who monitors and reports violators to the village mayor. Any violators will be disciplined and punished if he or she continues to violate the curfew. The last bell rings at about 6:30 p.m. and informs the villagers that they are now allowed to go out. People can work after the last bell but they must respectfully work with minimum noise and distraction.

it seems to have no success in our society.

The Fa'a-Samoa values have faded away. This has led to the demise of the structures that helped us to live out Fa'a-Samoa; and unfortunately, it has led to the deterioration of Samoan *aiga* (family) relationships.<sup>8</sup> One reason for this is that Samoans are no longer living in village settings. Trying to set up a different sense of village setting to nurture communal living with other Samoans is difficult. Young Samoans seem to have a shocking ability for getting in trouble because they are not subject to the traditional controls of family and village order operative in Samoa. As a result, they are often “trouble in their freedom.”<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, the American culture not only gives shape to the life of the Samoans but places great emphasis on the individual, a significant shift from shared living. Fa'a-Samoa places emphasis on family and interdependence between individuals. The pressure on Samoans to adopt the Western way of life is contrary to their culture and upbringing, and creates disorientation and confusion. This often perpetuated unhealthy Samoan mentality and behavior that has lead to undeveloped Samoan spiritual life.

Another factor that impinges on Samoan-American family and relationships is financial pressure. In most Samoan families both parents work. In some cases, the parents work two jobs and are surviving on only a few hours sleep in order to make ends meet. The outcome is twofold. First, there is no time to nurture relationships with

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<sup>8</sup> *Aiga* is where the Samoans initiates dialogue to hear people's voices, to evaluate and articulate people's opinions and thoughts. It is a “sacred sanctuary” where every individual needs and desires are deeply appreciated and valued for the joy of vibrant spiritual living.

<sup>9</sup> The term “trouble in their freedom” is employed here to illustrate the complicated problem encountered by the Samoans in the United States. Coming from a communally oriented culture to a dominant culture that is individualistically focused, the Samoans easily adapt to the new culture as a way to escape the traditional control and discipline. In doing this, they are left without traditional supervision and discipline which result in them being in trouble with the law.

children and extended family. Quality time with the children is seen only on a superficial level. Second, the children are now being taught by the television and teachers at school about existing values, without the opportunity to learn about their Fa'a-Samoa heritage and spiritual values.

Because of these insistent problems, the Samoans yearn for a renewal of a theology of Samoan spirituality.<sup>10</sup> Although many long for a return to the Samoan roots, others want a theological method for empowering religious education for spiritual formation. However, many Samoan Christians are not fully committed to participate in formal critical reflection about it. These different longings imply a need of integrating both, a psycho-theological method and Fa'a-Samoa in the educational ministry. The questions that concerned me are: How can the Samoan church rally its own cultural roots to stimulate religious education for Fa'a-Samoa? What are the resources of Fa'a-Samoa that suggest, outline, and empower our spiritual life as Samoan Christians?

Given these challenges, this study exhibits vital life-giving images of Fa'a-Samoa for spiritual formation and nurture. It proposes a theology and psychology of Samoan spirituality that can effectively address this problem. If revitalized Fa'a-Samoa is to have a transformative impact on the Samoans, then creating a context where Samoans can practice and engage in critical Fa'a-Samoa dialogue with one another, where they can debate and discuss without hesitation spiritual issues, where they can hear and know one another in the differences and complexities of their experience, is essential and helpful to the growth of their spirituality. Samoan spirituality cannot have a tremendous influence

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<sup>10</sup> This presupposition was based on numerous discussions with the leaders of the Samoan church regarding the merging of theological education and Fa'a-Samoa. The congregants have also challenged Samoan *fai'feau* to integrate Fa'a-Samoa with biblical teaching. Fa'a-Samoa can help bring the meaning of life that integrates the past with the new context of the present Samoa-American Christian situation.

on our lives if this step is never taken. When we create this space where we can value difference and difficulty, Samoanhood based on spiritual solidarity will emerge.

If Samoans can understand their own Fa'a-Samoa as metaphor, code of conduct, life in Christ, practice and psychotherapy of Samoan spirituality, they will appreciate it for God's glory in the awareness that even their own heritage reveals God's purpose for them. This will provide a new motivation for them to embrace Fa'a-Samoa dear to their own life. And if the Samoan church can become that context for family and village here, it can create a perfect ecology for communicating and sharing of Samoan values with others; and create a new way of building a new sense of village and family dialogue and of nurturing the communal aspect of Fa'a-Samoa for spiritual growth.

### Thesis and Argument

The Fa'a-Samoa can help provide religious education for spiritual formation and nurture, reassurance, appreciation, and a more holistic construction of an epistemology of God for the Samoan educational ministry; can help nurture the Samoan religio-cultural values at home and in the diaspora. These important values are the inmost aspects of our lives and of who we are as Samoans—Christian identity. On the other hand, they can deeply enhance theological and psychological meaning of our Samoan beliefs and values. Fa'a-Samoa is capable of enriching Samoan spirituality that had originated in the family and placed it within the capacity of the Samoan Christian church.

Samoan spirituality is a motivational power that enables Samoans to see their own cultural identity as God's unique creation, and accepting others with appreciation and caring attitude. It is a lifestyle which is influenced and nurtured by a relational bond with

the divine—that is, the Spirit of God; a way of committing to the purpose of God. God’s love and presence is innately housed in everyone’s soul as an influential force in the background, assisting one’s striving toward the ultimate value while being transformed by the Spirit. God’s grace to us is always mediated by finite realities. And since we are earthly beings, those mediating realities are themselves earthly.

Samoan spirituality has helped Samoans confront various frustrating life issues such as family-paradigm shifts, individualism, globalism, cultural and religious pluralism, and relating to one’s self and how that self is relevant to the understanding of God and others. The Fa’a-Samoa conveys a communal responsibility and the role of the individual within the family, church, and society. The effectiveness of Samoan spirituality is that it draws upon the strength and life of Fa’a-Samoa to exist. It is evident that often Fa’a-Samoa interventions heal when traditional American therapy fails, because Fa’a-Samoa unties the emotional knots that stop the life-force from doing its work.

To explore the core thesis of this study, I focus on these major questions:

1. What kind of framework for Samoan spirituality is pertinent for a contemporary Samoan ministry in the United States? How would this framework be utilized?
2. Can Gustavo Gutierrez’s framework of liberation spirituality be employed with integrity for the empowerment of Samoan ministry in a Samoan church?
3. Will theological and cultural perceptions of the self surface as a “stumbling block” in the development of a framework of Samoan spirituality? If so, what will be the problems? How will they be addressed? In what way would they be resolved without any serious compromising of the principles of Fa’a-Samoa?

4. For what does a Samoan church empower its members spiritually? What would be the role of the congregation in this process?
5. Is Samoan spirituality necessary for the Samoan church to rekindle and empower its members and community?
6. How significant is the Fa'a-Samoa in the re-evaluation of spiritual formation? What important implications does this have for religious education and dialogue?
7. Theoretically, can the theology of Fa'a-Samoa and Gutierrez's spirituality of solidarity bond together in the attempt to rediscover a motivational factor to stimulate Samoan spirituality? How?
8. What pedagogy emerges from Samoan spirituality? In what ways can we implement this pedagogy?

### Research Methodology

Hermeneutic Research (HR) is one of the primary methods used in this study. It is hermeneutical in that it seeks to interpret the experience it studies—in this case, the Samoan spiritual life—in order to make it understandable and meaningful in the present without violating its historical reality. In addition, Grounded Theory (GT) is used to explain and interpret the experiences and stories from participants based on knowledge and experience within the local and abroad contexts, Samoan church and its community.<sup>11</sup>

Hermeneutic Research and Grounded Theory will be employed to provide: (1) a

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<sup>11</sup> For a detail discussion of Grounded Theory (GT) see Sharan B. Merriam and Associates, Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 142-58.

description of Samoan spirituality in the United States and abroad; (2) a critical analysis of Fa'a-Samoa way of life; (3) an interpretation of Samoan experience and issues, and (4) meaning of spiritual and cultural texts and Samoan spiritual processes of transformation. In addition, field-notes, Samoan community meetings and discussions, archives, and narratives will be re-evaluated to interpret and justify the reality of how we are responding to the shaping of Samoan spirituality.

This study is also based on ethnographic observations of the experiences of local situations, together with information gathered from discussions with the local people. As an effective way of exploring the depths of the reality of Samoan experiences and expressions, the term "interview" finds little value in this work. One cannot touch the depth of Fa'a-Samoa when research is carried out in terms of formal interviews. Information from interviews, then, remains only on a theoretical level and does not really touch the profound roots of the Samoan life experiences.

Eight villages in Samoa were visited in researching this project.<sup>12</sup> The goal was not only to observe Fa'a-Samoa in various village settings, but these visits were an opportunity to witness most of the historical remains of Samoan ancestral traditions. Also, Samoan communities in California and Washington states were selected for ethnographic observation and for discussions to take place with people from local towns to cities.<sup>13</sup> The sharing of peoples' ideas, the way these people perceive and understand

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<sup>12</sup> Villages were carefully selected predominantly on the basis of the Fa'a-Samoa, especially for their cultural preservation. They are the villages of Olosega, Ofu, Sili, Fitiuta, Faleasao, Ta'u, Fagaitua, Auasi. Internship, Jan. to April 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Most of the discussions were held during the Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa conference meetings. In the past six years the Samoan church held meetings to discuss spiritual issues, church development, and leadership for the Samoan ministry. Samoan communities in the Los Angeles area were observed at occasional visits in a time-span of over six years (2000-2006); the author

Fa'a-Samoa in the United States, and the major role of the Samoan church in the face of modern changes to the church and society, were observed and heard with serious attention and documented.

The study of Samoan herbal medicine, navigation, and architectural technology was also carried out. These major aspects of Samoan life certainly reflect Samoan spirituality, how they are integrally accustomed to the spiritual realm of nature. The using of plants as medicinal remedies certainly has tremendous value; there is always a claim of therapeutic properties. In Samoa, architectural skill is an esteem gift, believed to be granted by the god Tagaloalagi, who is believed to be a builder himself.<sup>14</sup> House and boat building skills make up a major profession. Etymologically, the Samoan linguistics and terminology employed in everyday life and culture were originated from these professions. Navigation skills are significant. When deployed on fishing expeditions, the crew relies greatly on the *tautai* (master fisherman) for their safety.<sup>15</sup> The *tautai* must accurately examine and calculate distances between stars and wind currents for both sailing and a perfect spot for a big catch. Importantly, he relies greatly on his relationship

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had also visited San Francisco, Hayward, and South City (2001, 2004, 2005), and the Tacoma area (2002-2003).

<sup>14</sup> The god Tagaloalagi was considered by the Samoans to be the *matai tufuga* (the master builder of the universe). He alone built the entire universe and resides in the expanse of *lagi tuasefulu* (tenth-heaven). The *lagituaiva* (ninth-heaven) and other heavens below him are subordinate deities to the god Tagaloalagi.

<sup>15</sup> The esteem of *tautai* skills can be realized from these words of Lowell Holmes: "During our stay in Manu'a in 1954, our year-old daughter became seriously ill and had to be taken by interisland vessel to the hospital in Pago Pago. The boat arrived, but the surf was higher than it had been in many weeks. The Samoans said that there was only one man who could safely guide the longboat through the heavy surf and reach the vessel. This man, Upega, was ill and could barely use his legs. When Upega heard about our crisis, he instructed the members of his household to carry him to the longboat. He took the sweep oar, and as the boat moved out toward the line of breakers, he counted the waves and at just the right moment gave the oarsmen the order to pull with all their strength. The boat plunged through two lines of breaking waves and then found smooth water. Behind us a great cheer went up from what appeared to be everyone in the village wishing us well. It is to these warm and gentle people that I dedicate this book." See Lowell Holmes, *Samoan Village* (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1974), x-xi.



with nature to help him identify the sea current and direction for sailing. These skills, significant to the expression of Samoan spirituality, were also studied with attention.

Samoan elders also possessed special astronomical knowledge to forecast future weather for planting, fishing, and hunting. They can tell beforehand if a cyclone is heading their way so they can be prepared ahead of time, and are skilled artisans of counting waves in order to paddle safely out in to the deep sea. They are capable of interpreting the chiming of birds and animals, swiftness of the wind, and banging of waves to predict future happenings. These did not require any modern technology to analyze or interpret future occurrences as we have them today. It only requires harmony with creation and relying on their knowledge of the spirits to predict what lies ahead. These are the vital aspects of Samoan existence, the architectural and navigational elements of Samoan spirituality.

While other Samoan religious educators may resonate with the experience as echoed in this study, the research method is designed to provide an in-depth of ethnographic study and contextual analysis of spiritual lifeway and lifework of Samoans in the United States and Samoa.

### Definitions of Relevant Terms

A lack of clarity in definition of terms has been a barrier to many readers in prior research studies. Therefore, it is important to clarify my main concepts in ways that will best serve the purpose of this study.

### Culture in General Perspectives

Leslie Newbigin characterizes culture as “the sum total of ways of living built up

by a human community and transmitted from one generation to another.”<sup>16</sup> Lowell Holmes and Kim Schneider explain culture as “the learned and shared behavior that people acquire as members of a society.”<sup>17</sup> The Latin word *colere*<sup>18</sup> proposes that culture is human guidelines in the general sense. This description implies that culture is simply a result of the work of human minds and hands, as Richard H. Niebuhr puts it.<sup>19</sup> Culture therefore is manmade; it presumes social responsibilities and thus adjusts to timely changes. Eugene A. Nida puts it, “If there is to be human culture, there must be human society, which not only expresses this culture but transmits it.”<sup>20</sup> Louis J. Luzbetak describes culture as “a plan, consisting of a set of norms, standards and associated beliefs for coping with the various demands of life, shared by a group, learned by the individual, and organized into a lively system of control.”<sup>21</sup>

From these definitions of culture, it is clear that culture has to do with “learned and shared life.” It is a plan for living and a code for action, for survival, and for success in life. To convey culture demands a language—an important element of culture. It expresses the ideologies of a society, and initiates mutual understanding and validates communication.

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<sup>16</sup> Leslie Newbigin, The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Lowell Holmes and Kim Schneider, Anthropology: An Introduction, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1987), 164.

<sup>18</sup> The Latin root *colere* means to take care of, to preserve, or to cultivate. The meaning suggest human doings or movements, and a shift from agriculture to religious sect.

<sup>19</sup> Richard H. Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 32f.

<sup>20</sup> Eugene A. Nida, Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1954), 28.

<sup>21</sup> Louis J. Luzbetak, The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 157.

### Spirituality in General Perspectives

Paul was the first to summarize spirituality as an expression of affirmation to God, a grateful “Yes” from the heart of a believer which, in the power of the Spirit, is manifested in act and attitude. The possibility of this “Yes” is grounded in God’s “Yes” to the believer in Jesus Christ, a “Yes” experienced by Paul as the drive of his life and teaching.<sup>22</sup>

Christianity defines spirituality as the affiliation and conformity with God that one experiences through his or her reception of the grace of God, and willingness to turn from sin and walk according to the will of God. Karl Rahner described spirituality in general terms as rooted in the experience of Jesus; a unique and total event.<sup>23</sup> Spirituality found its philosophical roots in Plato who first define spirituality, in general, as “right action which cannot exist apart from knowledge.”<sup>24</sup> Aristotle differs from Plato who reduced the quest of knowledge to the living of the moral life. For Aristotle, the moral life is a preparation for the life of contemplation (he calls βίος θεωρητικός – “life of contemplation”).<sup>25</sup> His definition clearly implies spirituality as the strictly consecrated life in God, primarily because for Aristotle God is essentially engaged in self-contemplation.

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<sup>22</sup> Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., Dictionary of Paul and His Letters: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 906; 2 Cor. 1:17-20 and Rom. 8 NRSV.

<sup>23</sup> Karl Rahner, The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality ed. Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt. Trans. R. Barr. (London: SCM Press, 1985).

<sup>24</sup> R. M. Hare, Plato (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Meredith, “Greek Philosophy, Wisdom Literature, and Gnosis,” in The Study of Spirituality, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (London: SPCK, 1986), 92; William D. Mounce, The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 245.

From what has been discussed, spirituality means a “new life” through union with Christ. In its philosophical sense, the contemplation of moral life is the most perfect life for human being. Spirituality, therefore, means becoming something more than human. It is life unity of both divine-human dimensions of one’s spiritual life.

### Fa’a-Samoa

Fa’a-Samoa—the Samoan lifeway and lifework—is shared religio-cultural actions and attitudes that Samoans experience as members of a family or village. Nearly everything Samoans do is learned from other Samoans. As the little Samoan becomes adult, he or she will begin to think and act like influential associates—family members, neighbors, friends, and community members. When a Samoan child has fully learned his/her culture he/she will behave very much like his/her contemporaries and not very differently from his/her ancestors.

Fa’a-Samoa is Samoan in essence, a “textbook” for ethical and moral guidance. It is a manual of principles for faithful living with one another in peace and harmony; a conduct for a lifeway of reverence. In a cognitive meaning, Fa’a-Samoa is a set of rules, abilities, and attitudes which Samoans use to generate and interpret social interaction and to thereby function as effective members of the Samoan group with which they identify. Fa’a-Samoa is a psychological makeup of Samoan culture—the mind-body-soul.

### Samoan Spirituality

Samoan spirituality is a fusion of both cultural and religious beliefs. It includes all of the Samoan life—religious and cultural. It is life lived under the influence of the Spirit of God in which Samoan Christians guide every aspect of their existence, including

politics, economics, health, sexuality, and education as well and prayer and meditation. All of these are in the realm of Samoan spirituality.<sup>26</sup>

In a sense, Samoan spirituality is both *apophatic* and *cataphatic*. Apophatic has often described as imageless or formless spirituality. For example, one's experience of the god Tagaloa who spoke to him or her in a dream is a gift to better one's life. This is more like an illumination experience. Cataphatic employs images and prayers and songs or anything that surrounds us as a vehicle through which to know and experience God. This has referred to as the way of how we attempt to meet God. The Samoan spirituality is grounded in the story of Christ; they are each legitimate expressions of Samoans who have lived experience of God through Christ. At the depth of our Samoan spirituality lies our unique nature of transformed people who are becoming more aware of our self-centeredness and learning to surrender our will to God.

Samoan spirituality, therefore, is nothing less than a theory of Samoan existence, founded on the dynamics of Fa'a-Samoa, that function as a ground for being in the world and in the presence of the Spirit of the only living God. It is a fusion of both cultural and religious beliefs and values. Underneath these values and beliefs lies our unique nature of transformed individuals who are becoming more aware of our self-centeredness and learning to surrender our will to God, a vital part of who we are as Samoans.

### Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation is the inner shaping of our ultimate experience with oneness, the Spirit of God. This reality is based on a relationship with God involving the

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<sup>26</sup> A detailed articulation of Samoan spirituality, including its etymological account, is discussed in Chapter I.

orientation of our desires and actions, and the shaping of our values and beliefs. We can only wait for it to show itself and shine at the depth of our human being. This showing, which will be a real empowerment, is beyond our power. Spiritual formation is an exciting experience of disciplined Christians emphasizing holistic spirituality—nurturing body, mind, and spirit. It is life for those who are hunger for deep spiritual connection with the Spirit. Spiritual formation fosters new spiritual rhythms in people’s lives and relationships. In the course of transformation believers discovers Christianity’s rich spiritual heritage through worship, learning, and fellowship. At a personal level, participants find a time and space to discern direction, make covenants, and practice commitments.

### Resources Employed

When researching for primary sources on Samoan spirituality, I discovered that there is no previous work done specifically on “Samoan spirituality.” I have found that most writings about Fa’a-Samoa were written by those who were not Samoans in origin.<sup>27</sup> Yet their works are treated as significant resources for this study. These resources have provided a new way of seeing the relationship between Fa’a-Samoa and spirituality. They have provided the author culturally and theologically a way to approach and explore the density of Fa’a-Samoa and perspectives on Samoan spirituality.

The work of Herman and Stuebel provides an explanation of Samoan customs and traditions. These traditions provided a window into the spirituality of the ancient Samoa

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<sup>27</sup> Their work were studied and interpreted with careful attention because their findings demonstrates the occurrence of Samoan emotional state, but also suggests profound religious-social matters helpful to the understanding of Fa’a-Samoa spirituality.

in terms of politics, relationship, philosophy, and history, supplemented by the wisdom of many well-known Samoan chiefs.<sup>28</sup>

Kramer's work provides a general narrative of Samoan spiritual and social behaviors that are interwoven to foster community ethos and a way of life. He analyses the Samoan material culture; surveys boat-building techniques, tattooing, *siapo* (bark cloth) making, weaving and cooking and medicinal remedies, along with a host of other facets of everyday Samoan life. His analysis of the Samoan material culture discloses knowledge of Samoan spirituality which has its focal point in the *aiga* (family).<sup>29</sup>

The work of Holmes provides many case studies into the wealth and complexity of Samoan life as it is lived in different ways. Particularly significant is his account of how the Samoan world and culture has been changed by the effects of modernization. J. A. C. Gray, also, writes about the history of American Samoa and many cultural-religious changes involved during the period of naval administration and missionaries. These changes had affected the Samoan community in terms of cultural identity and, of course, spirituality.<sup>30</sup>

Turner provides significant accounts of Samoan "native life" in the past 100 years. His work presents the transition of Samoan culture and history of religious motifs, from the spirit inhabiting an individual body to the deity presiding over all individuals.

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<sup>28</sup> Tala o le Vavau: The Myths, Legends, and Customs of Old Samoa, adapted from the collection of C. Steubel and Brother Herman, rev. and reprinted (Auckland, NZ: Polynesian Press, 1987).

<sup>29</sup> Augustin Kramer, The Samoan Islands (Auckland, NZ: Pacific Book Producers, 1994); Ancient Samoan Culture and History, trans. Bro. Herman (Pago Pago: Association of Marist Brother's Old Boys, 1949).

<sup>30</sup> Lowell Holmes, Quest for the Real Samoa (Annapolis, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1987); J. A. C. Gray, Amerika Samoa: A History of American Samoa and Its United States Naval Administration (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960).

In the context of lived spirituality, long before us, Samoans used the basic words which opened up the area of reality which is call Samoan spirituality.<sup>31</sup>

Keesing's work is a study of the problem of government when the complications incident upon political action are combined with a fundamental clash of cultures—Samoan and Western. Keesing's work provides a brief historical examination, an outline of present population conditions, and a summary of Samoan political and social organization.<sup>32</sup> His work is helpful in the review of the present problem of changes in the political involvement and spiritual life of the Samoan Christians.

Newton A. Rowe writes about the native life of Samoa. Rowe writes: "Samoans are extraordinarily good...with gracious manners and an innate love." He went on to discuss the lifeway of Samoa as it came into contact with the outside world. The lifeway of Samoa involves significant activities such as offerings to the gods, hospitality to strangers, wood crafting, architecting, other daily ceremonial activities and the like.<sup>33</sup>

Derek Freeman, although his uncompromisingly refutation of Margaret Mead's account,<sup>34</sup> opens the way for a more balanced approach toward the interpretation and understanding of Fa'a-Samoa in the shaping of Samoan lifeway mentality. He talks about Samoan etiquettes, polity for social investigation, and the early history of Samoa.

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<sup>31</sup> George Turner, Samoa: A Hundred Years Ago and Long Before (New York: Adament Media Corporation, 2003); first published by Macmillan and Company, New York, 1884.

<sup>32</sup> Felix Keesing, Modern Samoa: Its Government and Changing Life (New York: AMS Press, 1978).

<sup>33</sup> Newton A. Rowe, Samoa Under the Sailing Gods (London: Unwin Brothers, 1930).

<sup>34</sup> Derek Freeman, Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead: A Historical Analysis of Her Samoan Research (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); Margaret Mead and the Heretic: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth (Ringwood, Australia: Penguin Books, 1996).



His work provides a logical understanding of Fa'a-Samoa of the past comparing to today.

R. P. Gilson writes a history of Samoa that provides a most colorful example of the impact of Western civilization upon once isolated, but far from simple, people. Gilson possessed significant knowledge of the documentary sources, in Samoan as well as in European languages; and he supplemented this by first-hand study of contemporary Samoan society—describing Samoa and its traditional culture.<sup>35</sup> His work highlights the impact of missionary, commercial, and politics that brought Samoa into the modern world, a crucial contribution to knowledge for this study.

Margaret Mead provides an ethnological account of the Samoan people and their lifestyle. She offered an account of the Manu'a society, economic life, ceremonial events, people's daily life, and the role of the individual within this structure; given a characteristic account of religious life and how it was sanctioned by the evidence of the Christian God.<sup>36</sup> Though Tagaloa was the creator god of the Manu'an, it is possible to regard the Christian God as his direct successor.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to these resources, attention was also given to aged writings on Samoa. This includes the London Missionary Society records (LMS), especially the

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<sup>35</sup> R. P. Gilson, Samoa 1830 to 1900: The Politics of a Multicultural Community (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1970).

<sup>36</sup> It must be noted that the Manu'a'n acceptance of the Christian God had occurred prior to the arrival of Margaret Mead in the Manu'a islands to do her study. The Manu'a oral tradition claimed that the Manu'a people had first received the Gospel through their contact with foreign visitors and sea merchants prior to the arrival of the Christian missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS)—John Williams and Charles Barth in 1830. The Manu'a chiefs claimed that the Manu'a group had first learned about God by way of a Dutch exploring expedition under Commodore Roggewein in 1722. Discussion with author, 11-13 March, 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Margaret Mead, Social Organization of Manu'a (Honolulu: Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin, 1976). Although Mead's work has been highly criticized by the Samoans, her account of Manu'a provides contextual reports and issues significant to this study that were common in the late 1920s. Despite Freeman's attack on Mead, the point of differences lies only on Mead's miscalculation of Samoan adolescents as "free loving" which depicted a negative and flawless instance on Samoa.

writings of the early missionaries.<sup>38</sup> A wealth of theories, ideas, and strategies to the spirituality issue which are globally available online and in theological literature are also considered and integrated into this study.<sup>39</sup> These resources were read and re-read, criticized, and analyzed with integrity. The intention is not to leave any “stone” unturned for the purpose of validity and authenticity.

### Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study is focused on four major areas: paradigms of Fa’a-Samoa for empowerment of Samoan spirituality, resources for spiritual formation, religious education for Fa’a-Samoa, and theological expressions of spirituality and direction. The theological framework of Fa’a-Samoa and Gutierrez are drawn from to explain the contemporary and historical dilemma of Samoan spirituality. These works will be utilized to construct a fitting theology of Samoan spirituality appropriate for Samoan migrants in the United States.

As I review the literatures on previous studies completed, however, none uncovered ways of discussing or enhancing Samoan spirituality in order to preserve it and to use it in empowering ways in the Samoan community today. Consultation with

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<sup>38</sup> London Missionary Society (LMS) archives were acquired from the American Samoa Feleti Barstow Library, Pacific Church and Mission Collections; also, microfilm of the LMS missionary enterprise and John Williams can be acquired from Kanana Fou Theological Seminary, American Samoa, and Malua Theological College, Western Samoa.

<sup>39</sup> From a multiple online resources, just a few are mentioned here: “Theology: Spiritual Formation of Contemporary Christian Spirituality,” [article online]; (Southern Methodist University, 2002, accessed 20 Feb. 2006); available from [http://www.smu.edu/theology/formation\\_contemp.html](http://www.smu.edu/theology/formation_contemp.html); Theology Teaching and Learning Resources [online]; available from [resources.theology.ox.ac.uk/read2.phtml?school\\_letter&paper](http://resources.theology.ox.ac.uk/read2.phtml?school_letter&paper); Christian Spirituality and Justice Issues [online]; available from <http://www.dnx.com/rmbsof/>; Spirituality and Health [online]; available from “<http://www.spiritualityhealth.com/newsh/items/bookreview/html>”; Christian Spirituality at Shalom Place [online]; available from “<http://www.shalomplace.com>”; Christian Spirituality in Contemporary Culture [online]; <http://www.sympatico.ca/ian.ritche/Spirituality.index.htm>.

other institutions about Samoan resources was made and found limited educational efforts done particularly on Samoan spirituality. Therefore, this study is based primarily on ethnographic resources and especially the author's own Samoan experience.

Samoan spirituality and Gutierrez's framework for spirituality of solidarity will be integrated in the theological discussion of this work. The challenges and results of creating religious education that is able to empower Samoan faith and clearly articulate spirituality will emerge from this discussion.

Finally, this study will seek to elaborate an incarnational framework only to the extent necessary for creating some guidelines for Samoan religious education. The guidelines will be general so as to allow room for Samoan religious educators to contextualize and build upon them for their own ministerial context. I also will not be making an extended critique of Gutierrez's spirituality of solidarity but will highlight some theological parallels that can be drawn with Samoan spirituality with the purpose of expanding and deepening it.

### Rationale

This work will address religious education of Fa'a-Samoa as epistemology of Samoan spirituality in the Samoan community. I believe that the Samoans will have a better appreciation of spirituality if they could see it through their own cultural lenses. How this needs to be addressed will include the Fa'a-Samoa as epistemology to articulate metaphors, code of conduct, life in Christ, pedagogy and psychotherapy that are internally significant to the development and nourishment of Samoan spirituality. In the process of migrating from Samoa to the United States it is precisely the family and social

practices dimensions of our spiritual lifeway and lifework that are most affected.

In general, this study is specifically geared towards Samoan religious educators and community leaders in the Samoan community. It is the outcome of many “lunch debates” and formal theological discussions with church leaders of the Samoan church. This work is to embark on that yearning for a sensible understanding of Fa’a-Samoa as a form of Samoan spirituality, a motivational impulse for Samoan Christians to continue to have faith in God. This work may also benefit those who are interested in studying spirituality through the service of culture to understand the psycho-theological value and essence of spirituality.

#### Contribution to Theory and Practice of Religious Education

The major contribution this dissertation offers is a foundational research of Samoan spirituality. This dissertation is centered on two major questions: What are the primary characteristics which define a Samoan spirituality? What methodology is best suited for Samoan spirituality?

In doing this research, I will seek to place Samoan spirituality in dialogue with the theological concept of Samoan participants, religious educators viewpoints, and solidarity found in Gutierrez’ liberation spirituality. This will help bring Samoan theology into a larger theological capacity. I will also explore the religious education aspects of Samoan spirituality, and make suggestions for implementation by religious educators in the Samoan context.

Another major contribution this dissertation offers is an understanding of Samoan spirituality in light of its praxis. Praxis has a language of its own which tells us how to

come to an understanding of reality. That language contains many basic words: *a'u* (I), *oe* (you), *tamaita'i* (she), *tama* (he), *tatou* (we), *taule'ale'a* (man), *tina* (woman), *olaga* (life), *lalolagi* (world), *le Atua* (God), and *taeao* (tomorrow). Fa'a-Samoa cannot do without these basic words, which point to primary realities and, in pointing them out, bring them to light. Heidegger writes, "In its own original way the language of praxis gives an account of a given understanding of lived experience."<sup>40</sup> Fa'a-Samoa is that necessary language of lived-experience.

In summary, this dissertation offers a psycho-theological construction of Samoa spirituality in relation to religious education. Samoan spirituality is humanly formed and gives birth to the imprints, in its own unique ways, of the loving God. Our knowledge of God enables us to understand and practice Fa'a-Samoa in relation to self and others. This includes opening our hearts and rekindling our ability to experience the life of others and to give ourselves over to God. Samoan spirituality is about the love we feel for others, the joy of singing in a church choir or the look of wonder on a child's face. It is about experiencing the presence of God in our lives and opening a door to a life of passion and care. These are the moments that feed fire in our soul and make our lives worth living. What is good Samoan spirituality without these things?

### Narrative Outline

Central to the commitments of concerned Samoan Christians and churches is the attempt to redefine Samoan spirituality—the relationship between God, humanity, and the entire creation—as well as to explore better means for educational ministry. Hence

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<sup>40</sup> Martin Heidegger, Being and Time (London: SCM Press, 1962), 138.

the heart of this study is to rediscover the cultural and religious basis of Fa'a-Samoa in order to convey better clarity and a deep understanding of Samoan spirituality. This is applicable for the empowerment of the Samoan Christians and their ministry.

Chapter 1 of my dissertation discusses the philosophy of Samoan spirituality. It gives an aesthetic overview of what other spirituality theorists think of spirituality and how Samoan spirituality should be understood. It presents a holistic concept of the Samoan spiritual life, integrating Samoan religion and cultural ethos to bring out the inner-voice of the Spirit of God inherent in Fa'a-Samoa. It also discusses the etymology of Samoan spiritual life in which the early missionaries employed to refer it to a life lived in relation to God. Samoan spirituality stresses a relational approach to God, seeing God as one who teaches us through the Spirit into grow in to Christ-likeness.

Chapter 2 discusses Fa'a-Samoa as a metaphor of Samoan spirituality. It views Fa'a-Samoa from an allegorical angle in order to ascend to the deeper spiritual insights and meaning of Samoan spirituality. Historical aspects of Fa'a-Samoa such as social organization and ceremonial lifestyles that undergirds intrinsic spiritual values are discussed here. Major Samoan values are the principles by which we live in accordance with the purpose of what God has for our lives, are also discussed. Fa'a-Samoa has an important influence on the Samoan's self-concept and values, and plays a key role in nurturing the Samoan Christian's lifestyle.

Chapter 3 discusses Fa'a-Samoa as code of conduct of Samoan spirituality. Viewing Fa'a-Samoa as code of conduct, customs and traditions are discussed to convey different principles for spirituality. Through practicing of Fa'a-Samoa, the Samoans will appreciate and understand that their own culture discloses community self-understanding

of the past and a lifeline for future generations. What inherent in Fa'a-Samoa are cultural values of spirituality that are significant elements of Samoan life, and how they have become the customary practice of Samoan Christianity for spiritual formation and channels of religious education. These are the major aspects of Samoan Christians' relation to God.

Chapter 4 discusses Fa'a-Samoa as life-in-Christ of Samoan spirituality. The theological dialogue between Fa'a-Samoa and Gutierrez's spirituality of solidarity opens new windows of spirituality for Samoans. Such theological reflection teach us to become detached from those features of our world which separate us from God and to cling to the one who alone can satisfy our desire for solidarity. Theology of Fa'a-Samoa is to empower the Samoan Christians and their ministry; and lead people into the spiritual life that is fitting to the will of God. It humbly embraces the social embodiment of Fa'a-Samoa and the theological motifs of Gutierrez for spiritual nurture.

Chapter 5 focuses on Fa'a-Samoa as practice of Samoan spirituality. It considers Fa'a-Samoa from an educational perspective that helps improve the curriculum formation of religious education essential to the Samoans. Fa'a-Samoa religious education is centered on the church and family as a redemptive and transformative community. The contribution of religious educators viewpoint on teaching God's love to the world are essential to a construction of religious education for Samoan spirituality. Their work will be integrated with Fa'a-Samoa to help enrich religious education for Samoan spiritual formation.

Chapter 6 provides a description of Fa'a-Samoa as psychotherapy of Samoan spirituality. It looks at Fa'a-Samoa within the context of psychotherapy and contends

that it is essential to Samoan spirituality. Samoans will have a holistic view of health when they are in tune with community, and have a balanced relationship between these three elements: *Atua* (God), *tagata* (people), and *laueleele* (land/environment). These three elements are key ingredients of Fa'a-Samoa. To experience psychological health, the care of one's soul and the development of one's spirituality are fundamental. Fa'a-Samoa, as psychotherapy, brings healing not only for physical and emotional ailments but also for a sense of wholeness that can bring meaning, purpose, and a sense of inner fulfillment to the Samoan Christian life.

Finally, at the conclusion I will propose a psychological and theological foundation for Fa'a-Samoa spirituality, and suggest how this study may help Samoan religious educators employ this model and put to the test in Samoan congregations to see how effective it is in nurturing Samoan spirituality through the use of Fa'a-Samoa as a way to act, reflect, and influence one another in the Samoan society. This will help produce new epistemological perspectives, hopeful prospects, and boundaries that Samoan religious educators will use to assure continual practice of Fa'a-Samoa for spiritual formation and growth in the future.



## CHAPTER 1

## FA'A-SAMOA SPIRITUALITY: A THEORETICAL EXPRESSION OF VARIOUS FACTORS AFFECTING IT IN THE UNITED STATES

I begin with a story that will help illustrate the paradigmatic way of living of Samoan spirituality which integrates Fa'a-Samoa and spirituality. The best way to understand Samoan spirituality and nurture its psychological growth is to recognize the philosophy, metaphors, theology and pedagogy that may inspire and guide us on our spiritual journeys. The following story is an example:

After one year at Sycamore Elementary school, my daughter Beverley had made quite a few friends. One day, two of her best friends told Beverley not to play with them anymore. Disappointed and confused, Beverley left without questioning, 'why'? Many days passed, and Beverley kept wondering: Why do my friends not want to play with me anymore? What have I done wrong? Refusing to give up on her friends, she took a different approach. She started to think of ways to amend their differences.

Many attempts were made. Often, Beverley ate lunch with them outside the cafeteria and offered them a portion of her lunch from home. At other times Beverley tried to initiate a conversation with them, but they refused to speak to her. She helped them around the classroom, eagerly trying to reestablish a relationship. Then one day, she thought about creating a new group of friends in order to influence her old friends to play with the group. Beverley began to gather her other friends to play with her in order to lure her old friends back. It was frustrating at first, but the more she tried the better the chance that she could make friends again with Kayah and Crystal, her best buddies since Kindergarten.

At first Kayah and Crystal were hesitant to accept and play with the new group, believing that Beverley had some hidden motive in mind. When they started to play among the group which Beverley had formed, they were happy to know that there was nothing bad about it.

When asked, "Why did you do it? If they didn't want you to play with them, you can play with the other kids." The only answer she could give me was, "Dad, I like my friends."<sup>1</sup>

This story is so exciting because it portrays a spirituality which is both ordinary and

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<sup>1</sup> Beverley Niuatoa, sharing with author, May 2004. It must be noted that the story was conveyed by Beverley not exactly in the words narrated. Nevertheless, her exact words are shown only in quotations ("").

unordinary; ordinary because it shows one person's struggle to live what she believes in a way which is both real and meaningful, but unordinary because Beverley found the courage to venture into new terrain and to act in ways which are considered out of the ordinary for her particular belief system. In this story, one can note how Beverley looked first to her Samoan heritage, where she was raised and nurtured for guidance on how to respond to her own struggle.<sup>2</sup> When early attempts to amend her differences with her friends failed, she did not give up because she knew what she was doing was good for them. Although Beverley was only seven-years-old at the time, she surely had made use of her Fa'a-Samoa training at home by her parents and church. She acted upon the Fa'a-Samoan values of *fa'aaloalo* (respect) and *fa'alelei* (put to rights) in which she had learned and practiced at home to reconcile with her friends.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, this story also reveals a great deal about the *aiga* (family) I have shaped and the values I have used to establish it. It speaks of who I am as a person of profound religious beliefs and upbringing. From my earliest years, I have been taught by my parents, devout Christians and respected members of my community, to do the right thing. I have taken that guidance with me everywhere I go and whatever I do. I have been a Samoan Christian throughout my life. I find my Christian life and longing pulling in various directions. I have read widely on spirituality from the viewpoint of many

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<sup>2</sup> Samoan heritage cognitively teaches every household member ethical and moral responsibility in order to live as faithful citizens of a community. Each member, from children to adult, learns his or her responsibility through interacting and dialoguing with one another. In this way, the consecrated voice of Samoan traditions is the voice that speaks of God in relation to the pains and pleasures, the crises and opportunities, the dilemmas and despairs of twenty-first century life.

<sup>3</sup> For example, when visitors or guests are welcome to your home, they are immediately served with coconuts to drink, and later serve with food to eat. This is one aspect of *fa'aaloalo* and *'aao mafola* (hospitality) in the Fa'a-Samoa. Even a stranger who enters your home does not have to ask for a drink or food. He or she is involuntarily serves with generosity.

different religious traditions. I started research on spirituality. I began to get involved in youth and church activity more often. All of these practices have enriched my spirituality throughout the years.

As Director for Christian Education of the South Los Angeles Association, my upbringing and theological training have prepared me to do this ministry. I have made my choice to serve Christ not only through the Samoan church but through my commitment to other communities. I believe that my commitment to the Samoan church shines through all of my work. I love being a member of the Samoan church because of our tradition's firm emphasis on church unity, intellectual and theological independence, biblical faith, personal devotion, communal commitment enacted weekly in worship and in the partaking of the Lord's Supper, and especially on Fa'a-Samoa.

The Samoan church should be instilled with a spiritual energy which acts as a life-giving source in the lives of Samoans. The Reverend Samuelu Taesali reveal that some Samoan communities, in the attempt to preserve the doctrines and practices of the tradition, prevent those traditions from developing in meaning and application because they fail to bring them into dialogue with the concerns of the present generation.<sup>4</sup> Other Samoan communities compromise the integrity of Fa'a-Samoa altogether by allowing Christian teaching and practice to be changed by everything with which it comes into contact, so that only a mixture of the original aspects remains. In contrast, Samoan faith is definitely Christian in identity and focus, seeking to develop our faith and action out of the significant witness of Samoan Christianity from its inception to the present day.

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<sup>4</sup> Samuelu Taesali, discussion with author, 24 Sep. 2006. Taesali was one of the Samoan Christian pioneers who helped established the first Samoan congregation in the Los Angeles area. Taesali passed-away peacefully on Nov. 2006.

Samoan Christianity, with its global context and commitment to the historic faith tradition, provides an ideal setting for the exploration of a Samoan spirituality which provides for spiritual formation and promotes acts of Christ-like love. These aspects of the Samoan spiritual journey are needed in the Samoan church. As a Samoan scholar and religious educator, I wish to develop a way of articulating religious education which supports and nurtures this holistic thinking of Fa'a-Samoa. This is important to the theological and psychological formation of Samoan spirituality.

### Emerging Interest in Spirituality

There is a phenomenal interest in spirituality these days. This interest has resulted in the increase of religious counseling and literature published on spirituality. Although there is a growing interest and increased publication on spirituality, still many people today experience distress, worry, nervousness, fear, and a sense of insecurity.<sup>5</sup> There seems to be something lacking within our souls, something that could help revitalize and reconnect our souls to the eternally vibrant heart of God.

In the Samoan context, what we seem to be missing is a comprehensible theology of Fa'a-Samoa, a theology that can provide the kind of real stimulus to thought and action that enables Samoans to perceive and embrace the grace of God through our own cultural norms and practice. At the foundation of Fa'a-Samoa is a truth of faith which is intended to nurture the Samoan spiritual life. Religious education of spirituality would do well to point out as clearly as possible the major ways through which the truth about Fa'a-Samoa

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<sup>5</sup> Based on numerous researches on spirituality, this influence will continue to swell in the future. Spirituality, I confess, is a vague word, often used with no clear meaning, or with a wide and unclear significance, but I can think of no other single word to describe the subject. For a detailed discussion of spirituality, from ancient to modern, see Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, eds., The Study of Spirituality (London: SPCK, 1986).

can help foster the growth of Samoan spirituality.

This chapter offers a practical philosophy of Samoan spirituality and the various factors affecting it. It attempts to link Samoan experience and the life-giving traditions of Samoa that were instituted by the Samoans. By interpreting and transvaluing traditions of Samoa and experience with God's Word, Fa'a-Samoa as epistemology of Samoan spirituality can become an effective philosophy of life and psychotherapy for the Samoan Christians. The theological basis for Fa'a-Samoa practice has grown out of these specifics in the life of the Samoan church.

The primitive Samoans used to think that whenever anything bad occurred, the gods must be angry. They thought their gods wanted them to show their loyalty and respect by offering huge sacrifices, even of their own children.<sup>6</sup> Slowly but surely, Samoans with more philosophical turns of mind began a questioning of this supposition. Maybe, they thought, the gods would be just as happy if we let our children live. Such an idea involved a whole rearticulating of what life, God, and human nature are all about.

I have noted from many discussions, that Samoans have a lot of great ideas, and wrong ideas, about reality. If they are able to sort out these ideas and make sense of them, they may be able to better understand their own reality. Samoan spirituality is intended to help them recognize and understand philosophical Samoan religio-cultural ideas when they come across them, and see which ones make sense for them and which ones do not. This is apparent in one of the Samoan participants' words:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <i>O le soifua fa'aleagaga o Samoa o<br/>le ki e malamalama ai le uiga loloto</i> | Samoan spirituality is the key to a<br>profound understanding of |
|---|--|

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<sup>6</sup> Author's discussion with the chiefs Olosega village, Pinefa'amau, Saiaona'i, Tautala, Laauoleola, and Leau, 23 Feb. 2004.

*o tu ma aganu'u Fa'a-Samoa.*<sup>7</sup>

traditions and customs of Samoa.

A clear knowledge of Samoan spirituality can help Samoans embrace Fa'a-Samoa as a way to value God's love and as a way to enhance their outlook of Fa'a-Samoa as spiritual empowerment for their lives. Having said this, the author believes that what Samoans need today is a clear notion of Samoan spirituality and the approaches to help arrive at its core.

If Sandra Schneiders has said, "Spirituality is...a phenomenon which has not yet been defined, analyzed or categorized to anyone's satisfaction,"<sup>8</sup> how can it ever hope to gain credibility or attract its share of attention in the Samoan church? If the philosophy of Samoan spirituality is to continue finding its way into the Samoan church curriculum, it is essential to clearly define one's subject, and no subject seems more difficult to define than spirituality. What David Knowles says about mysticism is no less true about Samoan spirituality today:

Everyone in our day who proposes to speak or to write of mysticism must begin by deploring both the ambiguity of the word itself and the difficulty of defining it in any of its meanings. Yet without some sort of definition and some kind of understanding between writer and reader as to what is being discussed no progress of any kind can be hoped for.<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, Samoan spirituality has not only failed to clear up the waters, but apparently made them even murkier. To date, precise philosophies remain elusive: the harder the

<sup>7</sup> Pinefa'amau Mata'u, discussion with author, 23 Feb. 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, "Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?" *Horizons*, 13, no. 2 (1986): 258.

<sup>9</sup> David Knowles, "What is Mysticism?" in *Understanding Mysticism*, ed. Richard Woods (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1980), 521.

Samoan religious educators try to outline the boundaries, the fuzzier the picture of Samoan spirituality becomes. Therefore, it is crucial at this point to clarify the philosophy and theological significance of Samoan spirituality in this chapter. This is for the purpose of providing a coherent view of Fa'a-Samoa and spirituality in the following chapters. The closer we get to the essence of Fa'a-Samoa, the better we see the very “mind-heart” of Samoan consciousness that is generating the epistemology of Samoan spirituality.

### Towards an Understanding of Samoan Spirituality: Theory and Practice

The problem of understanding Samoan spirituality is the diverging of cultural and religious environments which contributes to different Samoan religious educators' views. Although we are Samoans, we are brought up in different geographical settings with contrary ways of articulating and making sense of Fa'a-Samoa: *aganu'u* and *agaifanua*.<sup>10</sup> This diversity often clouded the theory and practice of Fa'a-Samoa; often perpetuated confusion and minimized the essential contribution of Fa'a-Samoa to spirituality and educational ministry of the Samoan church.

This same problem was raised by Campbell Wyckoff, “The most critical problem that faces Christian education is the need to understand itself—to gain deep insight into what it is about. It needs to see how it is related to the cultural situation, to the church's

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<sup>10</sup> *Aganu'u* (*aga* – conduct, ways, behavior; *nuu* – village) refers to the culture that equally tied all of the islands of Samoa in performance. For example, at any formal gathering a ritual of *sua ta'i* is installed for the guests of honor which includes the ingredients of a coconut, tray of taro and chicken, and *ie toga* (fine mats). On any ceremonial occasion a ritual of *'ava* is performed for the guests and those attending the event. *Agaifanua* (*fanua* – land or field) refers to how each individual village conducts and implement its own way of practicing Fa'a-Samoa. For example, in the islands of Manu'a when serving the guests the braided side of the *laulau* (Samoan tray made of coconut leaf) faces the guest; whereas in Tutuila and Upolu the midrib (trunk of the coconut leaf) of the *laulau* faces the guest or person.

life, and to the educational process. This problem of self-understanding is the problem of theory.”<sup>11</sup> This implies that no theory works without a coherent meaning of what its subject matter is about. It is my understanding that this is the major cause of ineffective teaching curriculum for Samoan religious education of spirituality.

Wyckoff points to the diversity of educational philosophy that has led to the ambiguity of religious education necessary for the Samoan church—how it was supposed to be taught and practiced. This is the problem I have observed in teaching Fa’a-Samoa and in the practicing of Samoan spirituality. I believe that a conscious reflection to a philosophy of Fa’a-Samoa can reposition us in the right direction of launching better meanings and greater realization for Samoan spirituality.

Fa’a-Samoa provides a logical understanding of the values and norms underlying the practice of Samoan spirituality. Thoughtful articulation of these values and norms are helpful to discovering our Samoan spirituality. I am referring to emotional affection towards others and an understanding of the way its situation transforms the way we embrace one another. Such a relationship between psychological care and transformation will help nurture Samoan spirituality.

The relationship between Fa’a-Samoa and spirituality must be primary to the transformation of the mind and soul. Fa’a-Samoa must be able to provide momentum and energy to move the Samoan “heart” and improve religious education. Charles Melcher, who places the theory-practice relationship into practical focus, stated that one of the problems with any practice not based on theory is that it results in very little

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<sup>11</sup> D. Campbell Wyckoff, “The Relationship Between Theory and Practice: An Introduction,” cited by Harold W. Burgess in Models of Religious Education: Theory and Practice in Historical and Contemporary Perspective (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 2001), 16.



support for education.<sup>12</sup> This implies that practice of Samoan spirituality must have a coherent theory to “walk the talk.” Any Samoan spiritual practice abstract from theory or a practice derived from unclear philosophy is nothing other than the disavowal of Fa’a-Samoa—both its theological and psychological significance.

Wyckoff offered a crucial framework as a means for understanding and expressing the philosophy of Samoan spirituality. He argues that any philosophy must have a method, curriculum, and administration as theoretical categories.<sup>13</sup> These categories creates religious education philosophy that deliberately sustains efforts of a community of faith which intentionally aim at enabling persons and groups to evolve particular ways of thinking, feeling and acting.

Jack Seymour and Donald Miller offered another crucial approach to a religious education theory of spirituality. Their approaches are: religious instruction, faith community, spiritual development, liberation, and interpretation.<sup>14</sup> They stress that the teaching and learning transaction consists of the transmission of Christian religious beliefs, practices, feelings, knowledge, and the effects to the learner, and the context is the church’s educational programs. These specifics help provides a structure for a comprehensive program of religious education.

James Lee proposed another approach to philosophy of religious education for spirituality based on his analysis of teaching and learning. He offered: setting, learner,

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<sup>12</sup> Charles F. Melcher, “Hope for the Profession,” Religious Education 67 (1972): 360; see also “Theory in Religious Education,” in Foundations for Christian Education in a Time of Change, ed. Marvin J. Taylor (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1976), 2-29.

<sup>13</sup> D. Campbell Wyckoff, “Toward a Definition of Religious Education as a Discipline,” Religious Education 62 (1967): 387-94.

<sup>14</sup> Jack L. Seymour, Donald E. Miller, et al., Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 11-34.

teacher, and subject matter.<sup>15</sup> His approach is helpful for objective analysis of teaching and learning in any context. Lee's method reaches deeper into the subject-matter and assumptions about the content and how we know it—on which all education is built.

The approaches suggested here are helpful in the realization of a theory of Samoan spirituality. The attempt is the creation of an epistemology that utilizes and mobilizes all the competencies of the person. Seymour, Miller, et al. present approaches that help religious educators in the weaving of Fa'a-Samoa discipline and practice, mainly stressing that teaching and learning matter consists of the passing of religious beliefs, practices, feelings, and knowledge. Lee stresses religious teaching as the key approach for connecting the learner to teacher and subject matter. Wyckoff suggests that theory will include a number of important curriculum components—program, process, and product. This will help rethink and reshape Fa'a-Samoa religious education for spiritual formation.

These propositions will help improve the philosophy of Fa'a-Samoa and religious education for spirituality; and help Samoan religious educators design effective curriculum for teaching Fa'a-Samoa to the Samoan Christians. I am aware of the fact that these propositions have rarely been put to good use in the Samoan church. However, I am confident that these suggestions will help improve awareness of possibilities and ways of developing and enriching of Samoan spirituality.

The clear benefit of understanding Samoan spirituality is the proper perspective one acquires through means of spiritual practice in order to experience the sacred—that which is most essential to our lives—for ourselves. Roger Walsh writes, “The ultimate

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<sup>15</sup> James Michael Lee, The Flow of Religious Instruction: A Social Science Approach (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1975), 232-40.

aim of spiritual practices is awakening; that is, to know our true self and our relationship to the sacred.”<sup>16</sup> This implies that spiritual practices can also offer many spiritual gifts for the nurturing of the Samoan heart and mind. They can be that spiritual drive working behind the Samoan practices for spiritual well-being.

Samoan spirituality places high emphasis on relationship toward others. The Samoan high virtues are to be well-mannered, compassionate, and generous to the elders, relatives, friends, and strangers. These virtues are the primary motivating factors for the Samoans throughout generations; the major “heart beat” of Fa’a-Samoa for social empowerment, spiritual and cultural practices, and the Samoan families and community. They inspire Samoans in attaining personal goals and maintaining and developing faithful relationships with others, at the same time as better equipping Samoans to cope with psycho-social, political, economic, educational and spiritual challenges they are now facing in the context of American society.

With this in mind, it is significant that we should look at how other traditions understand spirituality. No attempt is made here to put aside other philosophical presuppositions but to see how their understanding may help enrich our understanding of Samoan spirituality.<sup>17</sup>

### Contrasting Perspectives of Spirituality

Several recent studies have discovered the development of the term spirituality

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<sup>16</sup> Roger N. Walsh, Essential Spirituality: The 7 Central Practices to Awaken Heart and Mind (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999), 5.

<sup>17</sup> I have not attempted to trace the study of spirituality back to its origin. That will take another comprehensive study to accomplish it. But I only wish to begin from the biblical sense of the subject-matter.

from its origin in the Pauline neologism spiritual (πνευματικός), the adjectival form derived from the Greek word for the Spirit (πνευμα), to its prevailing use in pre-Vatican II Catholicism. Briefly, the adjective spiritual was coined by Paul to describe any reality that was under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Paul used it in 1 Cor. 2:14-15 to differentiate the spiritual person from the natural person (ψυχικός άνθρωπος). He was not contrasting spiritual with material or living with dead, but the person under the influence of the Spirit of God.<sup>18</sup> This theological distinction was dominant throughout the patristic period.

In the 12th century, a philosophical meaning developed opposing spirituality to materiality or corporeality. In the 13th century, spirituality was opposed to temporality to designate ecclesiastical jurisdiction in contrast to secular power. In the 17th century, the term spirituality came to be applied to the interior life of the Christian. Because of the primary emphasis on the affective dimension of that life, spirituality became associated with other forms of spiritual practice (such as quietism) in contrast to devotion. In the 18th century, it was referred to the life of perfection as distinguished from the ordinary life of faith. By the 19th and early 20th centuries, spirituality as a practice of the interior life by those oriented to the life of perfection was firmly established.<sup>19</sup>

As noted above, the term spirituality referring to lived experience is being used today to denote some experiential reality which characterizes not only Christianity but other traditions, in some similar fashion. Yet it is impossible at this point to locate the

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<sup>18</sup> Lucy Tinsely, The French Expression for Spirituality and Devotion: A Semantic Study (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1953), 705.

<sup>19</sup> Bradley C. Hanson, ed. Modern Christian Spirituality: Methodological and Historical Essays (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 20.

exact meaning of spirituality because it was broadly defined and difficult to pinpoint.

However, there are still other perspectives crucial to our conversation.

The solution offered by Raymundo Panikkar, in which spirituality is defined as “one typical way of handling the human condition”<sup>20</sup> is a little murkier. It does not really help us differentiate spirituality from any other type of human behavior. Under such a philosophy, every human attempt to cope with life could be considered as spirituality; for example, *fofo* Samoa (Samoan massager), acupuncture (Asian), psychotherapy (Western), and even the American liberation of Iraq would fall into the same category. The same is true of the view provided by Richard Hardy:

Spirituality is that attitude, that frame of mind which breaks the human person out of the isolating self. As it does that, it directs him or her to another in relationship to whom one’s growth takes root and sustenance.<sup>21</sup>

Hardy’s philosophy of spirituality is even more unclear. As an “attitude” or “frame of mind” directed towards growth in “relationship” with others, spirituality would have to include all kinds of human interaction, from the child who plays with an imaginary friend to the beginner who learns how to build a Samoan *paopao* (canoe) from a master boat builder.

Spirituality has also fascinated people outside the religious mainstream. Often it is referred to as “liberation, peace, and feminist” spirituality.<sup>22</sup> Spirituality occupies a significant place, not only within the churches, but also between the churches, and in

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>21</sup> Richard P. Hardy, “Christian Spirituality Today: Notes on Its Meaning,” *Spiritual Life* 28 (1982): 154.

<sup>22</sup> Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, trans John Variend (Leuven, Paris: Peeters, 2002), 1.

inter-religious dialogue.<sup>23</sup> These philosophies also provide us with clear boundaries, limiting us to social justice and interfaith activities. Yet the inclusion of non-religious involvement limits spirituality to experiences rather than attitudes or relationships.

If we turn to The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality, one English language source which should offer a helpful definition of “spirituality,” we found listed under “spirituality”: “a word [used]...to describe those attitudes, beliefs, practices which animate people’s lives and help them to reach out towards super-sensible realities.”<sup>24</sup> Here, the subject is narrowed significantly by limiting the concentration strictly to forms of human behavior aimed towards an invisible dimension. However, how is this philosophy of spirituality any different from a philosophy of religion in general, or from a description of every type of religious experience? According to this philosophy, then, the boundaries of spirituality are co-extensive with those of religion itself.<sup>25</sup>

In her article, “Theology and Spirituality,” Sandra Schneiders focuses attention on the vagueness of past philosophies, and tries to suggest a clear set of boundaries. According to Schneiders, all previous descriptions of spirituality have “something to do with the unification of life by reference to something beyond the individual person.” To avoid confusing spirituality with religion in general, Schneiders proposes this viewpoint: “spirituality refers to the experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in

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<sup>23</sup> Ewert Cousins, “Spirituality: A Resource for Theology,” in Proceedings of the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, (Catholic Theological Society of America, 1980, 124-125; William Johnson, The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion (London: Collins, 1978); Barbara Butler, and Tom Butler, Just Spirituality in a World of Faiths (London: Mowbray, 1996); Maria Jaoudi, Christian and Islamic Spirituality: Sharing a Journey (New Jersey: 1993).

<sup>24</sup> Gordon Wakefield, “Spirituality,” in Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 361.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.”<sup>26</sup>

Since Schneiders does not want to eliminate non-religious experiences from this picture, her perspective on spirituality still remains significantly broad. To prevent the philosophy of spirituality from becoming unclear, Schneiders proposes some more confined limits where spirituality is described as “that field-encompassing field which studies Christian religious experience as such.”<sup>27</sup> Here we have a description of spirituality within clear boundaries. It is much easier to understand spirituality when it is limited to experience rather than relationships or attitudes. This description also points to the fact that spirituality can never hope to develop a unifying methodology. It also suggests that we should look at spirituality from two basic approaches: dogmatic and anthropological.<sup>28</sup>

In Judaism, spirituality is the “cultivation and appreciation of the inward religious life.”<sup>29</sup> Islam sees spirituality as “the higher level than the material and psychic, being directly related to God.”<sup>30</sup> In Hinduism, it is “the transformation of an inner attitude.”<sup>31</sup> These definitions of spirituality, seen from the perspectives of several traditions,

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<sup>26</sup> Schneiders, “Theology and Spirituality,” 266-67.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>28</sup> For the dogmatic approach (from above) spirituality is the life derived from grace and therefore any experience which is not explicitly Christian can be called spirituality. For the anthropological approach (from below) the structure and dynamics of the human person as such are the places of the emergence of the spiritual life.

<sup>29</sup> Arthur Green, “Introduction,” in Jewish Spirituality, vol. 1, From the Bible through the Middle Ages (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1986), xiii-xiv.

<sup>30</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Introduction,” in Islamic Spirituality 1: Foundations (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1987), xvi-xvii.

<sup>31</sup> Krishna Sivaraman, “Introduction,” in Hindu Spirituality, vol. 1, Veda to Vedanta (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 2.

underscore the qualities cited at earlier: spirituality is concerned with the experiential, with the inner but not apart from the outer with the transcendent, or the divine.

At this point, it must be noted that while it is possible to define spirituality in such an inclusive way, there is no such thing as “typical spirituality.”<sup>32</sup> The problem with many of the contemporary views about spirituality is that many of the people do not know much about the mores of specific spiritual traditions. Likewise, many people do not know much about Samoan spirituality. Many read literature through the lens of modern assumptions about spirituality as a topic separate from, and essentially unrelated to, either primitive culture or theology.

In his book, The Care of the Soul, Thomas Moore claims that there are no quick techniques to make a spiritual person; rather, spirituality must be cultivated over time and can be described as a craft. Unlike many “self-help” guides to spirituality, Moore notes that the “care of the soul” requires moving beyond oneself to care for the world.<sup>33</sup> I see his approach to spirituality as simply anthropological bent.

Moore clearly criticizes “therapeutic manipulations” as reductive in their attempts to conform people to certain standards. He recognizes the importance of finding ways to move beyond the separation of the mind and the body, and reason and the emotions. He does this by endorsing the importance of the imagination in learning to see the world

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<sup>32</sup> The using of the concept “typical spirituality” points to the fact that spirituality cannot be define or confine to a single definition from the plethora of multiple current definitions. There is no standard way we can inclusively or exclusively practice or live spirituality. Spirituality is only meaningful and real when live and see from the perspective of those who lived and embraced the same culture or origin, precisely the point I’m trying to convey throughout this dissertation.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Moore, Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 19-20.



differently.<sup>34</sup> I'm not sure if Moore's approach is psychological or anthropological as I had stated above. Moore turns out to replicate some of the worst features of "consumer spirituality."<sup>35</sup> However, in spite of the problems with his assumptions and descriptions, I want to explore two reasons where his perspective differs sharply from a Samoan viewpoint of spirituality.<sup>36</sup> In each case, his analysis undermines Fa'a-Samoa practice of being engaged by God.

First, for Moore, the primary truth which spirituality explores is the "sacred," clearly distinguished from "God." Moore indicates that while his notion of "care of the soul" uses Christian terminology, "what I am proposing is not specifically Christian, nor is it tied to any particular religious tradition. It does, however, imply a religious sensibility and recognition of our absolute need for a spiritual life."<sup>37</sup>

From a Fa'a-Samoa point of view, Moore disregards any practice that might introduce spiritual seekers to sensibilities that need to be more fully developed as the seekers learn to desire to know God. He avoids any discussion of God. He suggests polytheism as a "psychological model," noting that human beings live better with diversity rather than striving for a "unity of personality."<sup>38</sup>

Moore's criteria for the sacred are determined by what the person finds to be the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 206-08.

<sup>35</sup> The use of the concept "consumer spirituality" implies that contemporary spirituality is shaped by consumer impulses and confined to a therapeutic culture. It avoids the disciplined practices necessary for engagement with God.

<sup>36</sup> It must be noted that I am speaking not only as a Samoan but also a devout Christian (in the sense of the word). The theological perspective discussed in this study is also fashioned around the author's Christian experience and as a Samoan scholar in the context of the Samoan church.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Moore, xv.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 241.

ultimate significance. Here, he may be very close to Schneider's view of spirituality as "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life toward the ultimate value one perceives."<sup>39</sup> For Moore, what is of essentially valuable is finding the "sacred" (the godly) which Schneider sees as "self-transcendence" toward the ultimate value. His polytheistic criteria are unclear for differentiating good "gods" from bad ones. It is only value to one's self.

Moore's polytheistic "sacredness" does not so much oppose the Fa'a-Samoa view of spirituality nor oppose the doctrine of God. He leaves room for Fa'a-Samoa Christian God in his pantheon, tempting readers to be inclusive of all gods and to feel that in doing so, they are continuing to be Christians. However, this is contrary to authentic Samoan Christian engagement with the God of Jesus Christ—a God who rather clearly opposes any idolatry.<sup>40</sup>

Second, Moore's conception of the self focuses almost exclusively on the autonomy of one's inner life. There is little sense that self-knowledge might be primarily of importance in regards to ongoing formation and change of desires in relation to God. Moore leaves judgments about how to "care for the soul" to the individual, completely independent of any need for instruction. As a result, the individual self, as autonomous chooser, is the primary person for educating a sense of "soul" and for determining which gods are most useful in that cultivation. Moore leaves no room for soul nurturing of the Holy Spirit. And because of his typical approach, spirituality can become damaging if separated from the larger story of God's dealings with people: the goodness of Creation,

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<sup>39</sup>Schneiders, "Theology and Spirituality," 266.

<sup>40</sup> Stated in the *Fa'avae o le Ekalesia Fa'apotopotoga Kerisiano i Amerika Samoa – Mataupu V: Mataupu Silisili o le Fa'atuatua, itulau 8*. (Constitution of the Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa – Chapter V: Theology of Faith, p. 8).

the saving grace of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and the promise of God's kingdom through the Holy Spirit.

Moore's analysis does not offer a vision of the self which fits into Samoan faith beliefs, correcting the potential corruptions about sin.<sup>41</sup> He fails to see any need for repentance, and nearly no implication in which God interrupts our lives. But according to Fa'a-Samoa, God intervenes in our lives if our rights as human beings have been violated by the power demonizing the world. Through its work, the Spirit of God comes into our lives by speaking to us in our hearts to be faithful, and offers us grace which enables righteous living. In this way, we may unlearn sin and learn to desire the knowledge of God and of ourselves.

For Moore, the self is to be cultivated in its own individuality in everyday life, but little else is needed or required. This is contrary to Fa'a-Samoa spirituality and faith. The self is cultivated through the practice of faith—prayer, worship, love offerings, and the like. It cannot stand alone by itself rather it needs spiritual “fire” for its nourishment, the work of the Holy Spirit to enliven it and keep it burning. Meister Eckhart writes that hidden in all of us is “something like a brilliant light that glows incessantly and like a burning fire which burns incessantly. This fire is nothing other than the Holy Spirit.”<sup>42</sup> Eckhart suggests that the fire of our spirituality is the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is the fire that actively sustains the development and transformation of the self.

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<sup>41</sup> In the Samoan faith belief system, whenever a person is accused of wrongdoing, he (or the family) must move immediately and act quickly to resolve it. This immediate action will help end and prevent potential conflicts or retaliation. The immediate action is a symbolic act of repentance and the accuser is humbly pleading for forgiveness and reconciliation from the victim and his family. On the other hand, the accuser has also sought forgiveness from God for his wrongdoing.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew Fox, commentary in Passion for Creation: The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart, by Meister Eckhart (Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2000), 373.

Moore proposed a sense of God-consciousness that seems to bear some affinities with the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher. However, Moore's intellectual and historical concerns add a dimension that is lacking in Samoan spirituality.<sup>43</sup> He represents a spirituality of the mind and heart which unite in the conversion of the whole person towards God. Schneiders view spirituality as experience. But experience runs some risk of being a vague term. One cannot understand it in the sense in which it would imply something beyond the sphere of language. If the ultimate concern is God revealed in Jesus Christ and experienced through the gift of the Holy Spirit within the life of the church, one is dealing with Christian spirituality. But Schneiders' definition, while excluding the orienting and organizing of one's life in dysfunctional ways (e.g. alcoholism), includes potentially any spirituality, Christian or non-Christian, religious or secular.

In Samoan spirituality, this experience is itself defined by the Fa'a-Samoa. The language that constitutes and expresses Samoan experience (whether it be a descriptive or dialectical character) is Fa'a-Samoa. There is no experience that does not express itself in language, or that is not—at a deeper level—itsself a language, even if it be only the language of intuition. Fa'a-Samoa experience then is neither specific to language nor exclusive to language. It is the language of Samoan spirituality. Samoan spirituality is

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<sup>43</sup> In his most important work, The Christian Faith, Schleiermacher specified religious feeling as the "feeling of the absolute dependence." Correlated with the feeling of absolute dependence is a consciousness or intuition of God. Human blessedness, he taught, consists in the strengthening of the God-consciousness, and sin is the obscuring of this consciousness. Jesus Christ shared the humanity of all human beings but was unique in the strength and constancy of his God-consciousness, and his redeeming work consists in the impartation of his God-consciousness to the believer. This is where Schleiermacher has been accused of making religious feeling or God-consciousness as purely subjective experience which misrepresents the term feeling. He held that it is always in and through one's experience of the whole interconnecting realm of the finite that there comes a sense of dependence upon the infinite ground of all things. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1999).

the highest potential of uplifting awareness that immediately directs one's knowledge to the ultimate concern which is God. On the other hand, it is what Eugene Taylor says "the evolution and transformation of personality."<sup>44</sup> The role of Fa'a-Samoa is the fashioning and transforming of personality. This could be achieved through the using of metaphors that transcends language by their deepest concern. Samoan spirituality, therefore, is concerned with illustrating how to live in righteous covenant with God in the conditions already bequeathed by Fa'a-Samoa.

### Complexity of Practicing Fa'a-Samoa: A Spiritual Dilemma

There are three major contexts for spiritual nurturing and practicing of Fa'a-Samoa. These contexts of Samoan lifeway and lifework are essential to the formation of Samoan spirituality.<sup>45</sup> To view the complicated root-cause of practicing Fa'a-Samoa, we shall look at these contexts complicating the practicing of Fa'a-Samoa here in the United States. They have been credited with creating conditions for the successful adaptation of migrant Samoans by providing economic, social, education, and psychological support. These three contexts are primarily the *aiga* (family), *galuega* (employment), and *aoga* (education). They help nurture social and spiritual stability and bring empowerment to the Samoan Christians.

### *Aiga*—Family: Fa'a-Samoa vs. American

Fundamental differences exist between Fa'a-Samoa and mainstream American

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<sup>44</sup> Eugene Taylor, *Shadow Culture: Psychology and Spirituality in America* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1999), 15. See also *A Psychology of Spiritual Healing* (West Chester, PA: Chrysalis Books, 1997).

<sup>45</sup> By Samoan "lifeway" I mean the Samoan's overall lifestyle pattern; whereas "lifework" is the Samoan's particular career or vocation.

views on family collaboration and individualism. In the United States, children are considered individuals with legal rights, at least in theory, equal to adults. They are regarded to be in the care of their parents until they are capable of establishing self-sufficiency. The involvement of educators or social institutions is considered persistent to the privacy of family. Physical discipline is discouraged and considered to be not in a child's best interest. Shaming as a method of discipline is felt to be psychologically damaging to the child's self-esteem and an unacceptable child-rearing strategy. Many mainstream Americans feel that if parents fail in their caretaking duties, intervention is warranted to protect the rights of the child.

In Fa'a-Samoa, by contrast, while children are highly valued, they are perceived as part of the total group rather than as individuals. In a system that ranks members by their ability to serve the total group, young Samoans are also in the social hierarchy. They are greatly loved, but to a certain extent are viewed as property—as valuable assets that, if invested in well, will ensure the future well-being of the communal group. Most mainstream Americans would consider offensive the idea of children as property.

Child-rearing in Samoa is a communal activity. A variety of relatives, including siblings, shares equal responsibility to take care of the young. Neighbors, elders, and church leaders act as “substitute parents” and may intercede if they see a need to correct or take care of a child, especially if the parents or other relatives are not around. The Samoan family relationship is so strong because of this communally caring spirit.

Physical discipline is the norm, considered to be justified both by Christian teachings and Fa'a-Samoa. It may be administered not only by family members but also by others such as teachers, elders or relatives. High Chief Mamea declared:

*O le sasa-fa'atonu o le tamaititi o le alofa ma a'oa'iga e lelei ma lavea'i mai ai i le amioleaga ma nisi o tu le manu'a e afaina ai fanau...*<sup>46</sup>

Physical discipline to save the child from getting into more bad behavior is considered an act of love, and is often followed by hugs and kind words...

At times, it may be brutal and may be allotted out to siblings not involved in the wrongdoing. In Samoa, shaming and humiliating a child in front of others is a common element of discipline, to teach the child to conform to acceptable group norms. Elder Tapu Sitagata offered his comments on this matter:

*O tagata Samoa e le malamalama i tulafono a Amerika ua mafua ai ona fa'asala ma tu'uina atu i ofisa e a'oa'oina le fa'aititia o le fasitama. O le aia mai o le tulafono, i latou o loo galulue i ofisa o tagata lautele ma le fa'amasinoga, e tele taimi e le malamalama ai matua Samoa i nei tulafono.*<sup>47</sup>

Samoans who use these practices in the United States are often seen as abusive in their actions and frequently result in child abuse referrals. Intervention by law enforcement, social work institutions and the court system while necessary, often confuse Samoan parents who are unfamiliar with these systems.

Because of this problem, the use of interpreters can help, but when intervention ends, many Samoan parents still have little understanding of effective alternate methods of discipline and either revert to physical discipline or fail to discipline at all for fear of further intervention.

In his speech at Tafesilafa'i, Governor Togiola Tulafono commented:

The challenge for Samoan parents to successfully rear their children in the U.S. is further complicated by a variety of conflicting influences that their children experience. Whether a Samoan child is at home, at school or in a neighboring community, acceptable behavior is always communicated.

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<sup>46</sup> Discussion with author, 15 Jan. 2004.

<sup>47</sup> Discussion with author, 20 Sept. 2005.

Samoan children in the U.S. are confronted by a multitude of conflicting value systems, starting in the home through television, radio, newspapers and magazines. Once they leave their house, whether go to school, play in the park, or merely go shopping with their parents, they see and hear a confusing diversity of behavior. There is no clear set of norms.<sup>48</sup>

In Samoan families, children are taught to follow the instructions of their elders and are given opportunities to solve situational problems or practice decision making. They are taught to be respectful and honor the norms of society. Close relationships between parents and children are nurtured in the *aiga* (family). As a result, if their vision of life values becomes clouded, they are equipped to sort out value-laden decisions.

The second major problem for practicing Fa'a-Samoa is the complexity of finding decent employment to help raise strong Samoan families. Acquiring a high-paying job requires quite a few technological and professional skills. In addition, because of rising economic inflation and competitive house prices, working a minimum wage job will not provide an adequate salary; and both parents must work to help the family survive. When this happens, the practicing of the Fa'a-Samoa in the family is seriously lacking.<sup>49</sup>

#### Galuega—Employment: Agricultural vs. Industrial

My affiliation with many Samoan traditional elders that share the concern about Samoans finding employment confirms my claim of employment as a serious problem.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, a recent study by Lui, of Samoan descent himself, showed that employment is

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<sup>48</sup> Togiola Tulafono, "Fa'a-Samoa o Ananafi ma le Taimi Nei" (Fa'a-Samoa of Yesterday and Today), speech given at the Tafesilafa'i, Long Beach, CA., 22 Aug. 2002.

<sup>49</sup> *Fa'aaloalo* (respecting the parents and those in leadership position); *'aao mafola* (hospitality and generosity to strangers) are only a few examples of Fa'a-Samoa rarely taught to the children.

<sup>50</sup> High talking chief Pouniu Laie, conversation with author, 13 March 2005; High chief Ioane Leasau, conversation with author, 23 July 2005; High talking chief Talafa'auto Lo'a, discussion with author, 29 Oct. 2005; The Rev. Puleinuutu Tafaoa, discussion with author, 11 Jan. 2006.



a problem for many Samoan immigrants. He discovered that finding stable jobs to support a family is less of a problem for Samoans than is retaining those jobs. Many Samoans have lost their jobs because they have been unable to move up the ladder due to lack of professional skills.<sup>51</sup> My research found that many have decided to quit their jobs because of stress and large amounts of responsibility conferred on them. Others left their jobs to care for their children or elder parents. In spite of the reason why many Samoans are unemployed, the problem purges right through its source, lack of professional skills and education.

The above claim discloses the fact that it is difficult for the Samoans to find employment that pays enough to support the whole family. The Samoan family holds more people than the average American family. The benefits of their labor that were commonly shared by the family in Samoa without regard to the measure of individual performance are no longer available. Since many Samoan immigrants do not have the industrial skills and professional experience necessary to acquire high paying jobs, they are forced to find jobs that are easily acquired.<sup>52</sup> The competitive life here is demanding for many Samoan immigrants. Many Samoan men work at entry level or semi-skilled jobs such as construction work, as taxi drivers, and the like. Fofogaoalii Atuatasi, a taxi driver, reported that he drives people from the early morning to late evening because it's the only job he can do. Fa'amafi Tunupopo, a Samoan farmer, works as a tree trimmer for his friend's company. He says, "This is not only the job I love to do but it's the only

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<sup>51</sup> David Lui, "Family: A Samoan Perspective," keynote presentation at the San Francisco National Conference of Samoan Churches, Christchurch Convention Center, 13-14 Sep. 2004.

<sup>52</sup> Iese Soifua, discussion with author, 12 Nov. 2005. Soifua claimed that his job pays him cash only because he can't do any other professional work.

job I can do that is related to farming.”<sup>53</sup>

Women, on the other hand, are predominantly employed as cashiers at department stores and gas stations and at fast-food restaurants. Some female Samoans work as office receptionists or secretaries. Only a handful becomes employed as executives, lawyers, professors, nurses or doctors in the United States. For the majority of young Samoan immigrants, joining the military is one of their only options if they want to become employed. A survey of Samoans serving in the military shows approximately a 0.9 percent military participation rate. In the year 2000, Samoan soldiers made up 3.6 percent of the active duty Armed Forces. Today, this percentage has moved up to 4.1 percent.<sup>54</sup>

According to a report by the Native Hawaiian Research Center (NHRC), the average Samoan is 14 years younger than the average American. Median age is 21 for Samoans and 35.3 for the United States in total. For the population ages 21 to 64, 25 percent of Samoans are disabled, 5.4 percentage points more than the United States median for this age group. If disabled, Samoans are also less likely to be employed. For the population ages of 65 and older, Samoans are much more likely to be disabled. In 2000, 58.2 percent of the population in this age group was disabled, 16.3 percentage points more than the United States average.<sup>55</sup> Of the population 15 years and older, 40.2 percent of Samoans have never been married, compared with 27.1 percent for the United

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<sup>53</sup> Discussion with author, 22 Jan. 2006.

<sup>54</sup> Eni F. Hunkin Faleomavaega, American Samoa member of the House of Representative to U.S. Congress, 11 April 2006.

<sup>55</sup> This occurs primarily because of the physical strain and dangers of construction work.

States in general, a difference of 13.1 percentage points.<sup>56</sup>

According to the U.S. Bureau of Census, the unemployment rate for Samoans is 7.4 percent compared with 3.7 percent for the overall population. Samoan women are 4.4 percent less likely to be employed. About 20 percent of Samoan workers are managers or professionals; about 13 percent of them work in the healthcare, the other 7 percent work in public education and private organizations. Only 19.3 percent of Samoans have a professional or related occupation, compared with 33.6 percent of the United States population, a 14.3 percent difference.<sup>57</sup>

**Table 1: Summary of Major Social and Job Statistics**

|                   | Population 21 to 64 years: Disabled | Population 65 and older: Disabled | Population 15 and over: Never been Married | Population 16 and over: Unemployment Rate in Civilian Labor Force | Percent in Managerial or Professional Occupation |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Samoans           | 24.6%                               | 58.2%                             | 40.2%                                      | 7.4%  | 19.3%  |
| United States     | 19.2%                               | 41.9%                             | 27.1%                                      | 3.7%  | 33.6%  |
| <b>Difference</b> | <b>5.4%</b>                         | <b>16.3%</b>                      | <b>13.1%</b>                               | <b>3.7%</b>   | <b>-14.3%</b>                                    |

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000.

We can determine from these statistics that most Samoan immigrants lack management and administrative skills required for high-paying jobs. One of the requirements for

<sup>56</sup> The Native Hawaiian Research Center, A Portrait of American Samoans 2000, (Honolulu: Native Hawaiian Research Center, 2005).

<sup>57</sup> U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000.

office work is computer literacy. The majority of Samoan immigrants are agriculturally trained, have no problem in planting, harvesting plantations, and have superb skills in the fishing industry. Nevertheless, many lack professional skills to climb the ladder in big corporations and many lack entrepreneurial experience.

Unemployment is cause of poverty. According to the poverty rate, most Samoan families are considered poor.<sup>58</sup> Nine percent of families earn less than \$10,000 per year, compared to only 5.8 percent of the average United States population. More than twice as many families fall below the poverty level (18.5 percent compared with 9.2 percent). More than one-third (37.5 percent) of the Samoan families with a female householder fall below the poverty line, a full 11 percentage points more than the United States average. An even larger percentage, 42.3 percent, falls below the poverty line if they have related children 18 years or younger, compared with 34.3 percent in the United States.<sup>59</sup>

In the housing category, more Samoans live in families, are younger, and have larger populations living at home. They live in smaller houses and are much more likely to rent rather than own. Samoans are less likely to own their own house. Because of such a tight-knit relationship of Samoans and the dependency on their *aiga*, most Samoans prefer to move in with their *aiga* when faced with the difficulty of finding a

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<sup>58</sup> Although most Samoans are considered in this study as “poor,” they continue to create conditions for the successful adaptation to their contemporary life situation. Samoans continuously live in close proximity to families, their stronghold in time of economic and social or spiritual needs. This is a visible witness of how significant and valuable the role of Samoan *aiga* plays in the life of the Samoan immigrants. Though many Samoans can be identified as living in nuclear or sub-nuclear households, the situation often closely resembles that of extended households in Samoa. All of my respondents, even in Samoa, have frequent interaction with members of their available *aiga*. Regardless of their current situation (as poor) they are able to withstand the burden of poverty through their close connection with other families.

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000.

place to live.<sup>60</sup> Of the 26,707 householders, only 34.8 percent are homeowners. In contrast, 66.2 percent of U.S. householders own their house.<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, the 51.5 percent of Samoan houses are 4 bedrooms or less, compared with 31.3 percent of houses in the United States. Yet Samoans average 4.08 people per occupied housing unit, compared with 2.59 in the United States. The 82.3 percent of Samoan households are family households, which is 14.2 percentage points more than the United States total. At any age, Samoans are less likely to be the head of household, which is defined by the Census as “the person in whose name the home is owned, being bought, or rented.” This is most prominent at ages 65 and above, where Samoans are only two-thirds as likely to be designated the householder.<sup>62</sup>

**Table 2: Comparison of Householders, as a Percentage of Each Age Group**

| <b>Householders</b> | <b>United States</b> | <b>Samoans</b> | <b>Differences</b> |
|---------------------|----------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 15 to 24 years      | 14.1                 | 9.7            | -4.4               |
| 25 to 34 years      | 45.9                 | 36.2           | -9.6               |
| 35 to 44 years      | 53.1                 | 45.1           | -8.0               |
| 45 to 54 years      | 56.5                 | 48.7           | -7.8               |
| 55 to 64 years      | 58.7                 | 47.9           | -10.7              |
| 65 years and older  | 63.3                 | 42.1           | -21.1              |
| 65 to 74 years      | 62.6                 | 45.8           | -16.7              |
| 75 to 84 years      | 66.4                 | 39.9           | -26.5              |
| 85 years and over   | 57.3                 | 26.8           | -30.4              |

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000.

Again, we can tell from these statistics that most Samoans are less likely to be home

<sup>60</sup> Samau Tali, discussion with author, 15 Nov. 2005.

<sup>61</sup> U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

owners. Only 34.8 percent of Samoans are home owners. At the age of 65 years or older, Samoans are more than 4 times as likely to be a parent or other relative within a household rather than being the householder themselves. Within this same age group, Samoans are 23.7 percentage points less likely to be a householder (43.4 percent compared to 67.1 percent) and females are 15 percentage points less likely to live alone.<sup>63</sup>

My recent survey, RE-411 Participatory Action Research (PAR) 2003, shows that about 0.8 percent of Samoans attending the National City church are participants in the Food Stamp Program alone. Roughly 55 percent receive assistance from the state. A few Samoans are receiving retirement pensions from the cannery factories—Star Kist Samoa and Samoa Packing in Samoa. Some have retired from the Public Works and Department of Education. Though most of them have worked past the age of 60 in order to qualify for social security benefits, they are struggling to economically maintain their families.<sup>64</sup>

The lifestyle of the Samoans in the United States contains many striking differences from that of Samoans in Samoa. Leulu Va'a found that Samoan immigrant life is not based on the existence of villages where a hierarchy of *matai* (chief) rule, planting and fishing are the sole features of the kinship-based, subsistence economy. In Samoa, Samoans interact with each other in familiar settings, in the Samoan language.<sup>65</sup> This kind of life setting is not available in the United States. Thus creates a problem for the Samoan immigrants because many of them are lacked higher education, nor trained with the professional skills needed to obtain a good paying job here.

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<sup>63</sup> Native Hawaiian Research Center.

<sup>64</sup> Sample Survey of Samoan-American Community (2005-2006). Samoan families include married couples, single parents and other household heads.

<sup>65</sup> Leulu Felisi Va'a, Saili Matagi: Samoan Migrants in Australia (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, 2001), 16.

Aoga—Education: Traditional vs. Technological

Samoan parents are often unfamiliar with the American school systems, have difficulties with the language, are preoccupied with economic concerns, and are unaware of the conflicts in values that their children are experiencing. Lacking knowledge of the structure of the American system, the demands and role expectations it places upon its teachers, they assume that teachers in the American system are acting as “substitute parents” to their children. If they do not hear from their child’s teachers they will probably assume all is well, so notes or letters sent home are usually not read.

Children frequently become aware of their parents’ unfamiliarity with the language and the school system and exploit this to their advantage. Because older children are often made responsible for the care of their younger siblings, a young child’s problems can result in the physical discipline of the older child. For this reason, sometimes school staff can effectively resolve minor behavioral problems through the older siblings. Communicating to parents in specific terms what expectations a teacher has for their child with regard to homework and behavior, along with help to assist their child, will greatly improve a Samoan parent’s ability to monitor progress before poor performance becomes an issue.

My friendly conversation with pastor Lu’ulau Gafa unveiled the complexity of the school system in the United States for his children. All of his children were educated in the Western Samoan system that was mainly conveyed in the Samoa language. He stated:

*E fai lava sina faigata o aoga i  
Amerika...e le faigofie i la'u fanau. O  
le fa'a-peretania lava lea e a'oa'o ai*

Education here is taught  
primarily in English and it was  
difficult for my children to

*aoga i Amerika...o le faigata ia i tamaiti ona mulimuli ai i le ulua'i taimi o le matou taunu'u mai. O le mea na fai...ua toe ripiti vasega a nisi o la'u fanau na aooga ai i Samoa. ina ia malamalama ma iloa uiga o mataupu fa'aapea fa'atonuga ua aumai e faiaoga ma tusi aoga...e tataua ona iloa e le tamaititi le Peretania. Ina ia iloa fo'i e isi tamaiti ma fa'asoa atu fo'i mo latou i mataupu, e tataua lava ona iloa tautala i le gagana Peretania.*<sup>66</sup>

adjust to it. As a result, my three children have had to repeat the grades from Samoa. To respond to the subject taught in school and to be able to understand the instruction given in the texts they must understand English. To share with students of different cultures about school projects and studies, they must know how to speak English.

Pastor Gafa discloses the fact that the educational and cultural dynamics of America are transforming the present age. It is this transformation which places pressure on his children to learn the norms and to speak the language of the dominant culture. Although this transformation creates conditions for the successful adaptation of modernization by providing educational support, it creates another problem of losing Fa'a-Samoa.

This conversation with pastor Gafa reveal that the Samoan values of education in the family and village, which have great impact on his family's spiritual lives, are replaced by the values of the American culture. These values have often been put aside by the children so they can concentrate on learning and adapting to the new cultural values and norms. For most Samoan children, once they learned the new cultural values they no longer look back to their own culture; they no longer take time to reflect on their Fa'a-Samoa. Samoan children need time for cultural comparison so they can even out what is missing from their own culture that is visible in the American culture for their educational needs. At the same time, what is missing from the American culture may be

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<sup>66</sup> Conversation with author, 9 May 2006. Pastor Gafa, prior to his appointment to the Samoan church in Los Angeles, was a pastor in the village of Lotoanu'u, Western Samoa. According to pastor Gafa and his wife, schools in the far remote villages in Western Samoa are really bad. After eighth-grade, boys are encouraged to attend the *aumaga*—a group of untitled men in the village while girls are called to join the *auluma*—a group of unmarried women and widows.



found and nurtured in the Samoan culture.

My research in other Samoan communities has provided me with different facts about the problem. I have found that here is an increase in number of Samoan students that are currently attending colleges that are graduates from American Samoa.<sup>67</sup> This implies that students from American Samoa are well prepared to go to college. Students from Western Samoa, mainly the villages closer to town are also well prepared to go to college (if not in New Zealand or Australia it will be in the United States). I have found that the factor which has contributed to this success is the up-keeping of Fa'a-Samoa in Samoa. The up-keeping of Fa'a-Samoa, as both a mental and physical discipline, has kept them away from trouble and strongly encouraged them to concentrate on studying hard and staying in school.

The 2000 U.S. Bureau of Census disclosed that Samoan children are less likely to graduate from high school and much less likely to receive a bachelor's degree or higher than the average American student. For the population 25 years of older, 77.1 percent of Samoans are high school graduates or higher, 3.3 percent points less than the United States average. Less than half as many Samoans as non-Samoan Americans have a bachelor's degree or higher (11.8 percent compared to 24.4 percent). Of that 11.8 percent, only 3.8 percent of Samoans (5.2 percentage points less than the United States total) have a graduate or a profession degree.<sup>68</sup>

College-age Samoans (ages 18 to 24) are less likely to be attending college than

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<sup>67</sup> It must be noted that not all of schools in American Samoa or in Western Samoa lacks training of students to enroll in college. Most of the schools that are affected with poor education are the schools located far away from town—the remote villages. These village schools are poorly equipped not only with applicable training aids and learning supplies but with teachers as well.

<sup>68</sup> U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000.

non-Samoan Americans. Only 49.8 percent are currently enrolled in college or graduate school, 14.6 percent points less than the U.S. total of 64.4 percent. Ages 25 to 34 experience the largest disparity in post-secondary educational achievement. Only 10.5 percent of Samoans aged 22 to 34 have a bachelor's degree or higher, 17 percent less than the 27.5 percent in U.S. population.

**Table 3: Comparison of Educational Achievement by Sex and Age Group in Percent**

| PERCENT OF AGE GROUP             | United States |        | Samoans |        | Difference |        |
|----------------------------------|---------------|--------|---------|--------|------------|--------|
|                                  | Male          | Female | Male    | Female | Male       | Female |
| High school graduate or higher   |               |        |         |        |            |        |
| 25 to 34 years                   | 81.9          | 85.9   | 82.1    | 81.2   | 0.2        | -4.7   |
| 35 to 44 years                   | 83.4          | 86.6   | 83.2    | 82.6   | -0.2       | -4.0   |
| 45 to 64 years                   | 82.9          | 83.4   | 73.5    | 71.9   | -9.4       | -11.5  |
| 65 years and over                | 66.4          | 64.9   | 56.4    | 44.4   | -10.0      | -20.5  |
| <b>Bachelor degree or higher</b> |               |        |         |        |            |        |
| 25 to 34 years                   | 25.7          | 29.4   | 11.2    | 9.8    | -14.5      | -19.6  |
| 35 to 44 years                   | 25.8          | 26     | 13.9    | 11     | -11.9      | -15.0  |
| 45 to 64 years                   | 29.3          | 23.7   | 16      | 11.1   | -13.3      | -12.6  |
| 65 years and over                | 20.5          | 11.8   | 13.5    | 5.7    | -7.0       | -6.1   |

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000.

These statistics highlight a fair assessment of the Samoans' educational achievement. It showed a minimum percentage of the Samoan educational level. I have come to believe that the statistics have provided me a clear reason why most Samoan school drop-outs are females.<sup>69</sup> Evidence from my own study in the Samoan community stated that among the mass Samoan immigrants in the United States, about 50 percent are elderly people. For

<sup>69</sup> This conclusion was based on the status of Samoan single-mothers attending the Samoan church. Also, my involvement in the Samoan community, as the South Los Angeles Association Youth Director, has provided me with concrete information to substantiate the claim by the Pacific American Foundation.

perhaps most of them are females, their highest level of education achieved was eighth-grade or even lower.<sup>70</sup>

What has been discussed has allowed us to peek through some of the challenges and real-life issues facing the Samoans here. The above analysis has allowed us the opportunity to develop our own perceptions of human issues, ideas and value systems, and to develop a critical understanding of the Samoan situational problems. In addition, from unveiling these challenging issues, this examination allows us to develop our own personal responses to the culture and society in which we live, and to encourage the imaginative and creative use of those responses in a wide range of religious educators' creative expression.

Now that we have identified and described some of the challenging life issues facing the Samoans, several important factors must be noted here from what has been discussed. These factors are vital in the spiritual dimension of Fa'a-Samoa as guidelines for ethical and moral living. It provides expressions of Samoan spirituality that are necessary for the nurturing of cultural norms and values in the Samoan community. It is crucial that Samoans should know the importance of these Fa'a-Samoa values in their attempt to live as faithful citizens of the United States.

### Fa'a-Samoa in Relation to Samoan Spirituality

Fa'a-Samoa is the all-encompassing description of Samoan culture, *aganu'u*. *Aganu'u* itself contains two distinctive characteristics: *aga* refers to the moral and social

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<sup>70</sup> Sample survey conducted by the author at the Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa in Los Angeles, San Diego, Oceanside, and Carson, 2003-2005. In most cases, the majority of older Samoans are hesitant to talk when one speaks to them in English.

or behavioral attitude of a *nu'u* (village or a community). *Aga* bespeaks the spiritual nature of the *nuu* or community, including the thinking philosophy and psychology of Samoan community. It includes their visions, hopes, anticipations, and fears, or the way they perceive and handle the hardships of life. This means that spiritual-social behaviors of the Samoan community are intimately interwoven to nurture a particular ethos and lifeway of a Samoan society.

Fa'a-Samoa begins with the belief that there is a reciprocal relationship between the self (individual) and society. The self influences society through the actions of individuals thereby creating Fa'a-Samoa experiences, networks, and institutions. In addition, reciprocally, society influences the self through its shared language and meanings that enable Fa'a-Samoa experience to change the individual and through individual engagement in social interaction.

Fa'a-Samoa as epistemology of Samoan spirituality organizes experiences of God into images or cultures that can be understood by Samoans. The more significant images for God tend to be drawn from the realm of Fa'a-Samoa social organization: the family and the village community. Speaking of God as a Samoan chief leads obviously to a richly developed theological vocabulary based on that governing image. Speaking of Christ as a servant leads to an equally rich but quite different theological vocabulary.

To facilitate analysis in a study, I designed a scale of 1 to 12 was used to determine how strongly the Samoan households in the United States identified with Fa'a-Samoa. The households that believed Fa'a-Samoa should be practiced "in full" in the United States are ranked 9 to 12 on the scale; the households that were strongly against the practice of Fa'a-Samoa are ranked 1 to 4; and those that were supportive in some

respects and critical in others are ranked 5 to 8.

On this basis, Table 4 shows that 93 households (81 percent) deeply supported Fa'a-Samoa in the United States; 8 households (7 percent) strongly opposed it; and 14 households (12 percent) wanted to practice only certain aspects of the Fa'a-Samoa and leave behind other practices. If these 14 in the middle-way group are divided equally between the other two groups, 100 (87 percent) of the Samoan households supported the Fa'a-Samoa and 15 (13 percent) opposed it.

**Table 4: Attitudes to the Practice of Fa'a-Samoa in the United States**

| <b>Attitude</b>  | <b>Number of Households</b> |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Strongly supportive of Fa'a-Samoa                            | 93                          |
| Both supportive and skeptical                                | 14                          |
| Strongly opposed   | 8                           |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>115</b>                  |
| <b>Source:</b> Sample Survey conducted by author, 2003-2006. |                             |

Fa'a-Samoa brings certain dimensions of Samoan experience into clear focus. It is overflowed with the articulation of truth that captures and conveys its essence. In order to be adequate to the complexity of Fa'a-Samoa, religious and cultural language utilizes a variety of overlapping paradigms and disciplines. The infusion of this religio-cultural language accommodates all Samoan functions in a healthy rather than a destructive way. They help to designate clear rules to ensure justice and tolerance, contribute to a more caring community, and stimulate the intelligence of Samoan people who are ready to move on to higher levels of life complexity.

The idea of Fa'a-Samoa is essential to Samoan spirituality, and consists of a number of values and traditions: *aiga* (family), *gagana Samoa* (Samoan language), *gafa* (genealogy), *matai* (chiefly system), *lotu* (church), and *fa'alavelave* (ceremonial life and other obligations). There are also the associated values of *alofa* (love), *tautua* (service), *fa'aaloalo* (respect), *feagaiga* (a covenant), and *usita'i* (obedience). Fa'a-Samoa that is practiced in Samoa may differ from that practiced here. Not every Samoan has the same understanding of Fa'a-Samoa. But what remains constant is maintaining the family links with the homeland. Prayers, economic and financial support, material goods, and even relatives themselves, circulate within families around the world, or wherever the Samoan people live and work.

High Talking Chief Fofu Sunia claimed that Fa'a-Samoa was strictly fixed in a complex set of social hierarchies, family courtesies and customs that regulate their social, religious and political life.<sup>71</sup> Sunia discloses the significant of community that works on extended socialist principles and generosity, and social standing being shared by all members of the family. Important concepts of Fa'a-Samoa are *faia* (kinship) and *aiga* (family), the unit of life rather than the individual. Samoans have a very solid sense of identity and belonging. They have a strong connection to each other and also to God, our spiritual lifeway, to our ancestors—our land and mother country.

Fa'a-Samoa religious practices centers on the *aiga*. In the absence of a highly-organized priesthood the head of the *aiga* acted as leader and filled the roles of chief or priest. Spirits were consulted to ensure the well-being of the Samoan people. Every

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<sup>71</sup> Fofu I. F. Sunia, *Measina a Samoa* (Valuable Artifacts and Traditions of Samoa), vol. 2 (Suva, Fiji: Oceania Printers, 2000). See also *Lupe o le Foaga* (Doves of the Nest). (Pago Pago, American Samoa: Fofu Sunia, 2000).

Samoa family has some kind of relationship with a deity. The desire of the deity is sought through religious mediums such as *tapuaiga* (worship), *fa'alauaitau* (spiritual remedy) or *ma'i aitu* (spirit possession).

From this discussion of Fa'a-Samoa, one can view Fa'a-Samoa functioning in communal relationships. This function can help perpetuate Fa'a-Samoa as practice of Samoan spirituality, both its social and religious values. In fact, there exist individual *aga* (behaviors), but these can only be validated through participation in the Samoan community. There is a certain respect for the individual self; however, the totality of one's integrity is found and rooted in the interdependent attitudes—where the Samoan social and religious values originate.

#### Fa'a-Samoa and Social Values

Fa'a-Samoa is seen as a factor in the experience of values—mainly not with human values but with value itself. It mediates value for the Samoan experiencing that value. By human values, by a value or a system of values, I mean the foundation upon which a Samoan will choose one path rather than another, judged as better or worse, right or wrong. One can speak about Samoan values, but cannot know them directly, but only through an individual's expression of these values in behavior.

What I refer to as value resides in the situation, in the area in which an individual participates. What I have called a value is a part of the Fa'a-Samoa cultural system regarded as *measina* (precious traditions). According to this notion, one experiences value when his/her activity is filled with satisfaction, when he/she finds meaning in his/her life, when he/she acts not consciously choosing, but rather because this is the only way that he/she deeply wants to act. The interrelation of these values is what makes

Fa'a-Samoa very distinct in the social life of the Samoan community.

Dorothy Lee writes, "Value can be experienced only when relatedness with the surroundings is immediate and active."<sup>72</sup> Value can be experienced and nurtured only through the communal bonding of Samoans. It can be experienced only when the individual is not only open to the experience of the other but also is interacting with the other. The Fa'a-Samoa social values involve coherent relationship building and community interaction. This is what Fa'a-Samoa regarded as *measili* (highly reckoned and appreciated Samoan human values).

In Fa'a-Samoa, to humbly experience the other would be to initiate involvement into a relationship. According to this philosophy, value breaks down barriers that may diminish or even destroy the content of a Fa'a-Samoa situation. The value experience I speak of here has allusion to all Samoan truth. When the self is in business within a social situation, we speak of social value, though the experience itself is personal, it is bound to have value for the transacting other, also.

My point here is that the good is held to be social in nearly all communities where Samoan spirituality is structured in such a way as to maintain and enhance social value to provide for the Samoan situations. As I noted earlier, cultures differ widely in the forms of the behavior patterns exhibited, through which social value enters the life of the members of the society. They also differ in the kind of self they encourage the growing individual to develop and the philosophies of self and of other they offer as basic to relatedness.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Dorothy Lee, "Culture and the Experience of Value," in New Knowledge in Human Values, ed. Abraham Maslow (New York: Harper & Bros. Publishers, 1959), 165.



### Fa'a-Samoa and Religious Values

The concepts of Samoan religion and culture have been largely defined by foreign scholars as two separate entities, thus placing Samoan indigenous definitions as attachments subjectively assimilated to foreign definitions and presuppositions. Religion and culture are inseparable in the Samoan worldview.

Our inner experience—religious in nature—when we think of Fa'a-Samoa values is a feeling of something significant, something absolute, something essential for Samoan life, for our existence. What do I mean by the word existence in this context? The word does not only mean survival. Survival, as important as it is, is not really a value in itself. We observe that survival is present particularly in situations of great threat to life or in abnormal conditions, such as in severe bodily and mental illness. Existence means something much more than mere survival. It is what David Fontana suggests as “things that give life some focused meaning and purpose, and that involve excitement and commitment, help people to live longer.”<sup>74</sup>

What Fontana suggests is that existence means the realization of the individual's religious values and satisfaction of all human capacities in accord with each other. It is similar to what psychologist Daniel Goleman regarded as “emotional intelligence,” the capacity for recognizing our own feeling and those of others, for motivating ourselves,

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<sup>73</sup> It must be noted that social value, as in extrinsic value, means any kind of value something has for anything else. Religious value, as in intrinsic value, is the value that something has in and for itself. The only things that are for themselves are, of course, things with experience. With specific reference to Fa'a-Samoa value (value for sustaining the cycle of life) as the most important dimension of extrinsic value, such as communal, family and friendship value, health value, besides values of the human being.

<sup>74</sup> David Fontana, Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality (Malden, MA: BPS Blackwell, 2003), 209.

and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.”<sup>75</sup> Existence is our ability to understand, persevere, communicate clearly, make thoughtful decisions, solve problems, and work with others earns us friends and success. Existence in Fa’a-Samoa is communal living and the understanding of what each individual values in life.

If Fa’a-Samoa is a divine metaphor that unites cultural, social and personality systems into a meaningful whole, then there is no way in which religious values and Fa’a-Samoa can be treated separately. Paul Tillich, for example, sees religious values as the encounter of people with the spiritual, or that which is beyond their conception of ordinary reality...which compels the individual to acknowledge that he has an ultimate concern.<sup>76</sup> This implies that there is always a human desire to explore the other side beyond ordinary life, a realm set apart from everyday experience. Religious values in this sense refer to the experiencing of the sacred and the presence of the divine.

In Fa’a-Samoa, values were interpreted and infused into experience through an entirely different set of human values. Here relatedness is openly recognized and sought as the ultimate value. It is crucial for the empowering of a Samoan to achieve relatedness with the life of nature—e.g. *laueleele* (earth), *laau* (plants), *manu* (animals), *fetu* (stars), and *timu* (rain)—broadening in scope and increasing through life. However, relatedness is good in itself; we are ultimately related and a worthy relative of all of creation. The emphasis here was on formation of the self, both through and for relatedness. Attributes like these play a significant role in Samoan existence and in every aspect of life.

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<sup>75</sup> Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ (New York: Bantan Books, 1995), 43-4.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1953), 14. The ultimate concern is revealed in all creative functions of the human spirit. It is obviously visible in the ethical sphere as the unconditional seriousness of the moral order.

### Fa'a-Samoa Spiritual Worldview and Experience

Samoa has hidden underground currents that are usually visible during rainy seasons. These hidden currents are visible only when the clear-crystal shoreline suddenly changes into murkier dark-brownish water. Only at that time these hidden underground currents are made obviously visible on the surface. In a similar way, Samoan spirituality seems to be something brought to the surface by the deep underground currents that have given birth successively to the realms of spirituality. The spiritual experiences preserved in Fa'a-Samoa ascended to the surface. Experience is often defined in Fa'a-Samoa terms as spiritual, which responds to the total Samoan situation.

One of the major underground currents of Fa'a-Samoa is its mythological accounts of *agaga*—the spirits.<sup>77</sup> Fa'a-Samoa supported another form of spiritual direction that was shaped by the persuasive influence of the spirits to convert Samoan minds and save souls. The process was propagated by sequences of family prayer meetings, worship services, and several other religious activities. These dynamic progressions served as channels for divine grace and were regarded as sacraments symbolically presenting Samoan spirituality.

Samoans traditionally feared and respected several specific objects and places which they believed to be occupied by *agaga*. As a result, they kept their distance and remained silent when crossing such places. As a means of opposing these spiritual conceptions, foreign missionaries planted a new kind of spiritual awareness that overcome the indigenous spirituality. This overtaking was prompted by the fear of sin, a

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<sup>77</sup> Discussion with the village orators of Olosega and Sili, Lo'a, Malaga, Tuaifua, Moliipe, and Tau, 12 Jan. 2004.

phenomenon that was foreign to Samoan understanding, as opposed to the fear of supernatural influences. The fear of supernatural powers was viewed as part of the enslavement of the human soul by the missionaries. To free the human soul required the overcoming of belief in supernatural forces, a discipline taught by the missionaries to the Samoans, and was fostered through the teaching of local village *faiifeau* (pastors) who reacted against the primitive claims of *agaga* presence in such places or objects.<sup>78</sup>

### Agaga – Worldview of Spirits

*Agaga* simply means “to go” or “to come.” *Aga atu* means to “go away,” whereas *aga mai* denotes to “come”. The doubling of *agaga* is used to designate the soul as distinct from the body, which at death was supposed to go away from the body and proceed to a utopian place under the ocean. Samoans also claimed that *agaga* was to be the daughter of *Taufa’anu’u* (vapor of lands), which forms clouds, and as the dark cloudy covering of night comes on, many Samoans feel sleepy, because, supposedly, her soul wishes to go and visit her mother.<sup>79</sup> The belief in *agaga* leaving at the time of sleep and coming back to live in the body upon awakening was experienced as a daily process. Kramer stated that Samoans believed that “it [*agaga*] goes away when a person faints, and his revival is a sign that it has come back again.”<sup>80</sup> Due to this outside-inside movement of the spirit, visions and dreams were regarded as real in the sense that the soul had actually seen a vision.

*Agaga* also refers to *atamai* (knowledge), or to *manava* (breath). Stairs explains

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<sup>78</sup> Turner, Samoa: A Hundred Years Ago, 16.

<sup>79</sup> Pulelasi Aisake, Talafa’auto Lo’a, Pa’o Tautala, Leau Keresoma Moso, discussion with author, 11 Feb. 2004.

<sup>80</sup> Kramer, Ancient Samoa Culture and History, 123.

that Samoans believed when a person dies, his or her *agaga* left the body and proceeded to *Lagi* (the underworld region).<sup>81</sup> The *agaga* of the individual was seen to be accompanied by a group of spirits to its destination, and there the spirits engaged in paying visitations to the world of the living. It has been noted that *agaga* were classified as *aitu* (ghosts) that not only had human origins, but also had visible manifestations in certain objects, places of the land and the sea. Samoans believed that when the spirits visited the living world, a *vaaloo* (long boat with fire) was seen, and singing or lamenting was heard. During such visitations, fishermen were urged not to go fishing at night.

To further elaborate on Samoan spirituality, it is important to challenge the problem by studying the origin of Samoan spirituality. It is my contention that by tracing the origin of Samoan spirituality one will clearly see the concept and model for teaching and understanding Samoan spirituality deriving from the religious and cultural matrix of Fa'a-Samoa. By pointing out these important etymological elements of *ola fa'aleagaga* and how it began to exist as a motivational factor for the Samoans, one will understand the depth of Samoan spirituality. As Samoans living their life in accordance to the purpose of God, they strive to enrich their understanding of their relationship to God with their own cultural and religious heritage.

#### Samoan Spirituality—*Ola Fa'aleagaga*: Etymology and Exposition

Fa'a-Samoa is the language of a spiritual experience. The very history of Samoa has testified to this fact, unless we are determined to look at it with blind eyes and thus

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<sup>81</sup> John B. Stairs, Old Samoa: Flotsam and Jetsam from the Pacific Ocean (Oxford: Religious Tract Society, 1897), 21-24. Also, this belief concerning the “underworld” was common to all of Samoa in the past and present. *Pulotu* or *Fafa o Saualii*, an underworld place, was known as the dwelling place of the blessed. It is believed that here the spirit goes after death—a place where it never rains, and people eat and drink without labor.

exclude its context. And by “context” I mean not only a frame of reference but the very element from which the Samoan experience takes its form and expression. It is obvious that every Samoan spiritual experience is psychological and historical in essence and character.

The concept of “spirituality” originates from a Samoan view and consideration of *ola fa’aleagaga*.<sup>82</sup> *Ola fa’aleagaga* is highly regarded and an esteemed expression to distinguish between the two types of Samoan services: *tautua aiga* (service to the family) and *tautua tupu* (service to kings). This Samoan concept has a double meaning, *fa’aleatua* (godly) and *fa’aletino* (worldly). Out of these considerations, therefore, when a Samoan speaks about spirituality, he is referring both to the sacred (life in Christ) and the secular (life in the world). Lying deeply underneath the sacred and secular is our transforming encounter with the divine, God. This perspective acknowledges the fact that the holiness of God, although is present in the secular life, is separate from ordinary life. In other words, the spirit in us is from the Spirit of God, but the Spirit of God in the strict sense is an entity that is distinct from us. It is the Spirit of God that gives *ola* and authentically transforms *ola* as *fa’aleagaga*—spiritual.

### Exposition of *Ola*

The Samoan word *ola*<sup>83</sup> means “life” or “to give birth” (its other meaning refers to

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<sup>82</sup> The idea of “spirituality” does not find any basis in the Bible. The most adjoining word is “spirit.” When searching in the Bible for an equivalent to the word spirituality, I was, at first, disappointed. There does not seem to be one. Nevertheless, the reason for this negative respond is not the unavailability of such a biblical equivalent. Rather, it is the channel of research suggested by my own presupposition of the word spirituality, as matters pertaining only to God.

<sup>83</sup> As the mother give birth to a new baby (life), so God gives life to creation and sustains the lives of His children created in His image. The function of the Spirit as an advocate and comforter is reflected in the mother’s role as a care-giver. This entire discussion implies that the Samoan term *ola* could mean

a type of basket [weave from the coconut leaves] with a shoulder-strap used for holding). The word itself originates from the Samoan consideration of the mother giving birth to a new a baby—a new life. When a mother gives birth to a baby, the *fa'atosaga* (Samoan midwife) would declare publicly, *ua ola le tina* (the mother gave birth). Here, *ola* refers not only to the infant being born, but to the mother who survived the birth giving; parallel to the Greek view of ζοε (physical life). In humans, ζοε, accompanied by βίος (species) implies a manner of life closely related to ethos.<sup>84</sup> In Samoa, *ola* implies a quality and characteristic of living, and has both implications of *amio* (character) or *uiga* (conduct) and reveals a sacred tone of the mother as God's image of life-giving.

#### Exposition of Agaga

The word *agaga* is an ancient Samoan concept of “soul” or “spirit.” It originates from a Samoan consideration of several terms such as *aitu* (ghost), *saualii* (spirit medium), and *taulaitu* (magician). There seems to be no justification for the word *agaga*, as this word is probably a duplicated form of *aga*, meaning “conduct” or “function.” In the ancient Samoa, *agaga* itself was mainly used in connection with those in authority or power. Historically, only kings are thought to have possessed an *agaga*. Later in history, the bestowal of *agaga* was given to the *alii*—high chiefs and members of the village power structure appointed by the consent of the extended *aiga*. Once appointed, he automatically becomes part of the village hierarchy which has two levels: the higher level is *nuu o matai* (comprised of all chiefs), the lower is *nuu o taulele'a* (comprised of all

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either the “physical life” or simply “everlasting life” from God.

<sup>84</sup> Kittel and Friedrich Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 290.

untitled men).<sup>85</sup> There is also another level equivalent to *nuu o taulele 'a* known as *nuu o faletua ma tausi* (wives of the chiefs). They are unique in their roles. The *agaga* of the upper level are usually the decision-makers and power holders. Those on the lower are considered law enforcers, or simply “arms and legs” of the chiefs. Together with wives of the chiefs, their main role is to serve and protect the upper esteem level.

From this understanding of *ola fa'aleagaga*, one may say that Samoan spirituality is definitely rendering loyal service to the chiefs or village. This fine line of a Samoan speech may illustrate my point: *O lou tino ma lo'u ola fa'aleagaga ia fai ma taulaga soifua a aiga ma afioaga* (May your body and my spirit be a living sacrifice of the families and village). The idea *ola fa'aleagaga* has become the landmark of Fa'a-Samoa sacramental expression of spirituality. It is less concerned with elaborating a theory than with showing how to live communally with one another in the conditions actually laid down by a given Samoan cultural situation. It is expressed in terms of the experiences, ambitions, and greatness appropriate to Samoan consciousness.

In the development of the Christian church in Samoa, *ola fa'aleagaga* was transvalued into a Christian significance: *ola*, means “eternal life” and *agaga*, “spirit.”<sup>86</sup> Together we have a transvalued Samoan Christian rendering of *ola fa'aleagaga* as “the spiritual life” or simply “spirituality” in relation to Fa'a-Samoa. Samoan spirituality in this sense implies relationality and community, and transformation. *Ola fa'aleagaga* involves self-growth in the awareness of the presence of the Spirit. It involves life-giving to create life in others, and self-initiation in the community life of worship.

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<sup>85</sup> Discussion with orators of Manu'a islands, 23-24 Jan. 2004.

<sup>86</sup> *Agaga* is also a Samoan name for the Holy Spirit.



In other words, *ola fa'aleagaga* may be what Gregory Jones and James Buckley claim as “the transformation of our desires so we may learn to engage God through participation in particular, ongoing disciplined practices.”<sup>87</sup> Or it may be what Susanne Johnson claims that it “equips us to be critically self-aware of the culture in which we participate and to know the difference between the Christian story and the many stories of our culture that bid for our commitment to loyalty.”<sup>88</sup>

Johnson, Jones, and Buckley propose that personal participation in any capacity and role prepares individuals to critically evaluate the context of which he or she is a part of. Out of that participation, one will be able to see and understand the reality of God who is always in the lead of making us new and significantly transform our lives. In the process of transforming our lives, our religious and social values will also transform.

#### Philosophical Assumption for Enhancing Samoan Spirituality

At the beginning of this chapter, I stated that we lack something in our souls to help connect us to the presence of God. I also stated that what we need is a coherent philosophy and theology of Samoan spirituality to help us see God’s love flows in our lived situation. Here are some additional philosophical and theological assumptions which are essential for understanding how I approach and carry out this study.

First, Samoans are integrated beings, comprised of *tino* (bodies), *agaga* (spirits), *loto* (souls) and *mafaufau* (intellects). To say that a Samoan is *mafaufau*, *loto* or *agaga*

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<sup>87</sup> L. Gregory Jones, “A Thirst for God or Consumer Spirituality? Cultivating Disciplined Practices of Being Engaged by God,” in Spirituality and Social Embodiment, eds. L. Gregory Jones and James J. Buckley (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 5.

<sup>88</sup> Susanne Johnson, Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 158.

only is incorrect. Indeed, one or more dimensions may be more fully developed in each Samoan person, but this does not diminish the role the others play in one's life. For example, the physically strong Samoan may see no need for spirituality until his faith is tested by a stroke which leaves him paralyzed forever. These four aspects of the self interweave and affect each other. Helping Samoans to become aware of the relationship among these four dimensions and to seek integration is an important task of the educational process.

Second, *olaga* (life system) is the ecology of Samoan education. Because Samoans are social and communally oriented people, every activity, experience, and encounter is an opportunity to learn. This is as true for communities as it is as true for individuals. Because the spiritual aspect is one part of the Samoan *olaga*, activities, experiences, and encounters are also an opportunity to learn more about the spiritual journey one undertakes both in community and alone. In this context, Fa'a-Samoa religious education cannot just draw explicitly from religious activities, such as Sunday schools, but must consciously seek to infuse all aspects of Samoan living—work experience, the social situation, and personal struggles.

Third, in the educational process, theory and practice are necessarily interrelated as well. How a Samoan thinks about and describes the teaching and learning process cannot easily be separated from how he actually engages in the teaching and learning process. What is understood in theory must be applied in practice, and what is discovered in practice must be used to reinterpret theory. This means that the practice of Samoan religious education is not merely the theoretical application developed by some professional source working apart from the Samoan situation. Rather Samoan religious

education is a dynamic activity which draws from many sources, including the teachings and practices of Fa'a-Samoa, the cultural context in which teaching and learning take place, and the experiences of Samoans and the community of faith.

Fourth, religious education takes place in the midst of a religiously pluralistic context. The Samoan Christian tradition is never taught and reinterpreted in isolation, but always in relation to other religious traditions.<sup>89</sup> Even more, Samoan Christian identity is shaped not only by the teachings and practices of Fa'a-Samoa tradition, but also by encounters with and observations of the teachings and practices of other cultures that may follow a spiritual path very different from Fa'a-Samoa.<sup>90</sup> Samoan Christian congregations can best be attentive to this pluralistic context by inviting others to be in dialogue with persons representing other traditions and to face the challenge that such differences present.

The biblical call to integrate spiritual nurture with Fa'a-Samoa activity provides the basis for living Samoan spirituality and for engaging in spiritual formation in the Samoan church. It calls attention to the formation of a genuine Samoan spirituality needed for the transformation of Samoan Christian life and educational ministry. At the same time, it calls attention to the appropriation of Samoan spirituality in times of life turmoil.

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<sup>89</sup> I refer to traditions that are analogous to the Samoan church traditions such as the Western tradition, liberation theology of Latin America, the Israelite or biblical traditions, and Pacific Islander traditions.

<sup>90</sup> See also L. Shannon Jung, *Identity and Community: A Social Introduction to Religion* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980). Jung's focuses on the religious dimension of human experience. He employs the resources of sociology, psychology, theology, ethics, and comparative religion to create an informative introduction to religion in a helpful, popular format. He demonstrates how an individual's belief relates to social community.

### Towards a Logical Definition of Samoan Spirituality

Often spirituality is all too often profoundly misunderstood, becoming another commodity, a source of pleasure or power, or a way of making us feel superior to others, secure and exempt from the privilege and panic of existence. Interestingly, the definition in the Cambridge dictionary proposes that spirituality is the “understanding of the religious and not material parts of life.”<sup>91</sup> This implies that spirituality is apart from everyday life.

This presents a profound misunderstanding. As I see it, Samoan spirituality is not something apart from everyday life. It is an experience that occurs in the midst of, and gives depth and integrity to, our daily lives as people who live in a particular culture, in a particular place and time. As Olsen Steggink puts it, spirituality holds “on to the ‘spark’ that glows beneath all deep structures, beneath all social structures and beneath all physical existence, and which catches fire in communication with a divine nucleus of existence.”<sup>92</sup> What Steggink implies is that spirituality is a “spark” that ignites “fire” to link human existence to God (divine), the source of life. In other words, if spirituality is apart from human existence (our daily human interactions) then human life cannot “glow” (no life source), because it is separate from the source of our social and physical existence, which is God.

Samoan spirituality is essentially dialectical. God is thought of as God. Only when thought of as a God who reveals Himself, as the Other who is always part of our

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<sup>91</sup> “Spirituality,” in Cambridge International Dictionary of English (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1393.

<sup>92</sup> Olsen Steggink, “Study in Spirituality in Retrospect,” Studies in Spirituality 1, no. 1 (1991): 21.

lives. The best short definition of God may thus be as “interruption,” an experience which penetrates the surface of our lives to reveal new possibilities within us. Samoan spirituality involves challenges and transformation and is thus the opposite of belief in a “God” who is in effect the projection of our emotional, social and even political needs or a projection of a father-figure prototype proposed by Sigmund Freud or what Karl Marx called the opium of the people. However, to return to where we began, Fa’a-Samoa does not encourage interruptions which depend on authentic and deeply personal experience. What makes a genuine Samoan spirituality is the sense of self as open to the relationship of what is other, what cannot ever be fully put into words.

Fa’a-Samoa has been the lifeline of the Samoan faith community whether living in the United States or abroad. It is the “heartbeat” of their identity as Samoans. The Samoan understanding of God and the world is shaped by their experience of living and practicing Fa’a-Samoa. Without it, Samoan Christians are forced to seek other mediums through which to nurture their spiritual needs. To be separated from the “heartbeat” of their faith in God is to be separated from the web of Fa’a-Samoan spiritual interactions and dialogues.

### Summary

I have laid out a psycho-theological philosophy of Fa’a-Samoa and Samoan spirituality. Fa’a-Samoa in its symbols, figures of speech and traditions are discussed plainly in this chapter and they are in no way contrary to philosophical analysis. Samoan spirituality does not neglect the figures of speech, the metaphors, the inspirations, the disciplines and practices that as a matter of fact are to be found in Fa’a-Samoa.

I have found that lack of clarity has been a barrier to many readers. Therefore, an attempt was made to clarify the objective, concepts, and life-giving metaphors that will best serve the purpose of this study. The goal is to build a strong foundational knowledge of the relationship between Fa'a-Samoa and spirituality, to reground Samoan spiritual formation in its Samoan roots—roots that celebrate both our epistemological function and our capacity as religious educators.

The distorting idea and knowledge of Fa'a-Samoa hinders the creation of a coherent understanding of Samoan spirituality. As we have seen in our discussion in this chapter, spirituality is culturally diversified, philosophized in complicated methods, and practiced in a combination of ways and living which is spiritually different. Because of this complicated hurdle of understanding spirituality, an attempt is proposed to sketch out a philosophy of Samoan spirituality—a clear path to help the readers recognize and appreciate what is discussed in the following chapters.

Despite my considerable effort to contextualize Fa'a-Samoa we still need to understand the foundational and epistemological basis of spirituality. Human needs cannot be fulfilled by physical means alone. Though we need material goods for our physical sustenance, these alone cannot provide peace and comfort for the soul, which houses our spiritual needs. We cannot confine ourselves in the mundane world of the physical realm, because we will die if we don't acknowledge our spiritual needs. We need spiritual empowerment to sustain our everyday life.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> See also Dorothee Soelle, Death by Bread Alone: Texts and Reflections on Religious Experience, trans. D. L. Scheidt (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 3-4. She argues that bread alone kills us. To live by bread alone is to die a slow and dreadful death in which all human relationships are mutilated and strangled. Death by bread alone means being alone and then wanting to be left alone; being friendless, yet disturbing and despising others; forgetting others and then being forgotten; living only for ourselves and then feeling unneeded; being unconcerned about others and wanting no one to be concerned

Samoan Christians cannot live by Fa'a-Samoa alone. They must also live by understanding that Fa'a-Samoa sacramentally and metaphorically embodies spirituality, a relation to God that is necessary for the nourishment of their daily spiritual life. Under such conditions, Fa'a-Samoa is important. If Fa'a-Samoa is not of much value in our day-to-day spiritual life, I believe we would be quite right to abandon it. But I continue to believe that Fa'a-Samoa can actually provide us with enriching benefit of spirituality.

From what been discussed emerges significant categories for implementing religious education curriculum: theological assumption—*taofiga fa'a-mataupu silisili*; educational assumption—*taofiga fa'a-a'oa'oga*; dimension of faith engaged—*vaega o le fa'atuatua o aofia ai*; curricular starting point—*o ifea e amata ai*; methods—*auala e fa'agaoioi ai (metotia)*; and teacher-learner—*faiaoga ma latou ua a'oa'oina*. These are important categories that will be discussed later in chapter five.

We must keep in mind that every tradition has its own philosophy of spirituality, and there are similarities as well as differences among the various cultures. What is important is that which is fitting for each particular culture and people. Every culture has a special role to play in the development of spirituality. They all realize the value of spirituality and have the potential to enhance community love and unity. It is on this foundation that we can all understand each other's spiritual, economical, psychological, theological and social needs and work together. The benefits that Samoan spirituality can bring to our community depend on how well we really put them into practice.

The next chapter discusses Fa'a-Samoa as metaphor of spirituality. It attempts to describe Fa'a-Samoa as significant cultural medium conveying Samoan spirituality.

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about us; neither laughing nor being laughed at; neither crying nor being cried for by another.

## CHAPTER 2

## FA'A-SAMOA AS METAPHOR OF SAMOAN SPIRITUALITY: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Fa'a-Samoa is a communal living of sharing and participating in all events of life; a life living in awareness of a community situation and participating in every aspect of it. From that description, Samoan spirituality is a devotional life of continuing commitment and obligation. Fa'a-Samoa highlights the interior life with all its passions, dispositions and affection towards others. In a way, it is not very unlike that of the Pietists.<sup>1</sup> The only difference is that the Pietists had limitations to their quest for Christian perfection whereas Samoan spirituality consistently pursues perfection through both the physical and the spiritual dimensions.

This chapter discusses Fa'a-Samoa as metaphor for Samoan spirituality, and metaphor as “symbolic” of the “levels of reality which otherwise are hidden and cannot be grasped in any other way; [it] opens up a level of reality for which non-symbolic speaking is inadequate.”<sup>2</sup> What Fa'a-Samoa mediates as spirituality cannot be explained in any other way than through the Fa'a-Samoa itself.<sup>3</sup> It is the *episteme* (knowledge) of the Samoan's pathway to God, a clear recognition of the traditions of the Samoan life that help nurture and develop the spiritual side of our human nature.

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<sup>1</sup> Pietists believe in a life progressively conformed to the will of God, with the Cross borne daily, though always with joy. The Pietist idea found embodiment in the life of the Christian community established by the Bohemian Brethren, on the estates of Count Zinzendorf in Saxony. See also John McManners, “Enlightenment: Secular and Christian,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, ed. John McManners (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 292.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* ed. Robert C. Kimball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 56.

<sup>3</sup> It must be noted that Fa'a-Samoa is not in itself Samoan spirituality. Samoan spirituality cannot be simply confined to Fa'a-Samoa because Samoan spirituality seek wisdom beyond the Fa'a-Samoa in which they exist, so that they at once belong to a culture and at the same time attempt to enrich that culture.



Fa'a-Samoa as metaphor involves both the cerebral and physical cultures. The cerebral culture refers to the ways one sees, thinks, and judges Fa'a-Samoa whereas the physical refers to the practice of Fa'a-Samoa. The interweaving of both—cerebral and physical—formulates a coherent paradigm of Samoan spirituality. Samoan spirituality integrates all of the capacities of human being and leads to their interactive growth to form a Samoan vibrant spiritual life.

Samoan spirituality is not achieved by bonding only with existing structures but by affirming within each individual a sense of a religio-cultural identity which engages in community building and transforming dialogue with others. Samoan spirituality enables one to see one's own cultural identity as God's unique creation in one expression. This is obvious in the nonstop effort of the Samoans to maintain the wholeness of Fa'a-Samoa because they are both spiritual in essence and physical in reality. It is also apparent in the life of Samoan scholars and theologians who have labored consistently to learn and study the history and primitive religion and culture of Fa'a-Samoa.

#### Samoa: An Overview with Spiritual Connotation

The Samoan archipelago, which lies in a general east-west route at 14 degrees south latitude and 173 degrees west longitude, is volcanic in origin and is of relatively recent creation. The islands in the Samoan chain have much in common topographically. There are low coastal areas with sand beaches (where the majority of villages are located). The land rises immediately to highland ridges. Nearly all of the coastlines are fringed with coral reefs. On the island of Savai'i, mountain summits reach an altitude of 6,000 feet. In Manu'a, Mt. Lata reaches an altitude of 3,170 feet, but on the island of

Tutuila the highest peak is Matafao, with an altitude of 2,141 feet.<sup>4</sup>

Since Samoa has a tropical climate, with warm temperatures and plentiful rainfall (averaging approximately 150 inches per year), vegetation is dense and green. Bushes, ferns, grasses, and vines carpet the mountain slopes beneath stands of high quality timber such as *ifi lele* (intsis bijuga), *tavai* (rhustaitenis), and *asi* (syzygium inophylloides).<sup>5</sup> These timbers were the most popular house-building timbers in Samoa. Mountain tops are clothed in mosses, lichens, and ferns, and there is a general absence of trees.<sup>6</sup>

The animal population in Samoa—aside from domestic varieties of chickens, pigs, dogs, and a handful of horses and cattle—is small. Fruit bats (*pe'a*), sometimes referred to as “flying foxes,” are common. There are land birds including such game fowl as the wild duck and varieties of pigeons. The most important bird culturally is a small green parakeet (the *sega*) with red markings, that is referred to as the *manu a alii*, or chief’s bird.

Geographically, the Samoan people are identified as Western Polynesians, a category they share with the inhabitants of Tonga, Niue, the Tokelaus, and to a certain extent with the people of the Fiji islands. Though there are certain cultural similarities and numerous historical traditions concerning political interaction between Samoa and the Fiji islands, the two groups of people are distinctly different in physical type. While Fijians are usually classified as Oceanic Negroes (Melanesians), Samoans are Polynesian in physical type and thus constitute a racially hybrid group exhibiting a blend of physical

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph W. Ellison, Opening and Penetration of Foreign Influence in Samoa to 1880 (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State College, 1938), 23.

<sup>5</sup> See G. B. Milner, Samoan Dictionary (Auckland, NZ: Polynesian Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Holmes, Samoan Village, 329.

features. Howells described the Polynesian physical type as similar to the Whites in body form, though a little more solid. In this, but mainly in the head and face, they strongly suggest a mixture of Mongoloid and White, with possibly a little Negroid causing occasional frizzy hair.<sup>7</sup>

The language of Samoa is a dialect of the linguistic family known as Austronesian (formerly called Malayo-Polynesian).<sup>8</sup> It has further been placed in the subgroup Samoic, also includes the languages spoken by the inhabitants of Tokelau and Ellice Islands, Eastern Futuna, and Tikopia. It is a pleasant sounding language because of its liberal use of vowels, often been referred to as the “Italian of the Pacific.”<sup>9</sup> Roger Green maintains that Samoan was one of the earlier established languages of Polynesia.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the many attempts to pinpoint the origin of Samoa, it is still a matter of debate in anthropological circle. Today, as a result of considerable linguistic evidence and a trace of archeological data, most Pacific specialists believe that the voyagers from Southeast Asia (the present-day inhabitants of Indo-China) moved slowly out into the Pacific until they had settled the uninhabited Melanesian islands to the east of New Guinea by 1500 B.C.<sup>11</sup>

Although many outsiders claimed to have discovered the origin of the Samoan

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<sup>7</sup> W. W. Howells, Mankind in the Making, rev. ed. (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Company, 1967), 329.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>10</sup> Roger Green, “Linguistic Subgrouping within Polynesia,” Journal of the Polynesian Society 75, 6, no. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Holmes, Samoa, 7-8; Turner, Samoa, 10-15. Also, Malama Meleisea, et al. Lalaga: A Short History of Western Samoa (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1987), 41; Andrew Sharp, ed. The Journal of Jacob Roggeveen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 150-59.

people, Samoans have their own explanations of where they came from. Their stories of the Samoan world vary generally from that of the anthropologists.

### Samoa Heritage and Importance of Naming

*Samoa* is the name given to a group of eleven scattered inhabited islands in the heart of the Pacific Ocean. Some oral traditions claimed that Samoa was originally inhabited by people of Polynesian origins. Despite diverse claims about the origin of Samoa, there are two important emphases concerning root meanings.

Firstly, the root word is *moa*, which refers to the heart or soul or the seed of emotions. *Moa* is simply the center of the human-diaphragm, and when the prefix *sa* (sacred, consecrated) is added, it connotes the sense that there is sacredness in the human. The *moa*, in other words, is identified with humanity. Secondly, *moa* is a traditional name given to “hen.” Once the prefix *sa* is added, it implies that hen (chicken or birds and animals) was also sacred in the eyes of the ancient Samoa.<sup>12</sup>

Reinecke, in his classification of the origin of the name Samoa, offers three main descriptions of Moa:

Moa was the oldest noble family on the far eastern island, Manu’a, who ruled over all the group of the Samoan islands. *Sa* means to belong, to be related through deep and intimate connections. Samoa, in this sense, means, belonging to the *Moa*, the family.

Moa in the linguistic expression means, the soul of man, or the inner part of the humanity. Being engaged in an intimate relationship with the earth, Tagaloalagi allied the heavens and the earth. As he took the heavens as his eternal home, he offered his soul (*moa*) to populate the earth. *Sa* means sacred, consecrated, tabooed, or to be kept holy. Samoa in this sense is God’s consecrated or sacred soul and body.

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<sup>12</sup> The rendering of the name “Samoa” is constructed out of several ideas and thoughts of the Samoans who were participants in the discussion with the author.

Moa means “hen,” a very large and enjoyable bird on the island, which is portrayed in myths to be sacred, holy, etc. Samoa, therefore, means the sacred hen.<sup>13</sup>

There is another claim for the name “Samoa” that is traced back to the Polynesian waves of migrations when the Maoris of New Zealand brought with them on their long canoes the huge birds called moa. These moa were not only considered to be suitable for eating, but were also very tame and loved by the settlers. Since the Maoris first settled the islands, they decided to keep the hens as sacred birds from their homeland to commemorate their migration and settlement.<sup>14</sup>

Kipeni Suapaia relates a legend about the origin of the name Samoa by tracing it to the god-Tagaloa and his grandchild, Lu. Because his grandchild wanted to place his name before the name of his son, Moa, Tagaloa disciplined him and ordered him to honor and respect his uncle all his life. Lu was frightened and escaped down to earth and settled there. But Lu always remembered his father’s warning to honor Moa in all he did. Due to this, Lu named his new settlement Saiamoa, or sacred for Moa.<sup>15</sup>

From these different dimensions of defining the origin and the meaning of the word Samoa, one can conclude that the name is associated with ideas that feature inclusiveness, a sense of belonging, and sacredness. Samoa is a sacred land and it has an intimate affiliation with the ancestral god Tagaloa, the Creator. The divine affiliation

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<sup>13</sup> B. Reinecke, Samoa (Berlin: Wilhelm Susserott, 1902), 101.

<sup>14</sup> Kipeni Suapaia, Samoa: The Polynesian Paradise (New York: Exposition Press, 1962), 20. This theory is also discussed by Reinecke, but there is suspicion that it is not a legitimate argument, due to the migratory theory suggesting one of the Malaysian islands, Sunda, to be the origin of plants and animals of the Polynesian race. Peter Buck, an anthropologist, affirms this by stating that Samoans or Polynesians are affiliated with the Malaysians due to the similarities of languages, customs and traditions as well as the natural growth of trees and plants. On the other hand, the Kon Tiki theory by Thor Heyerdahl suggests South America as the origin of plants and animals of the Polynesians.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

preserves its sacred character and meaning. Even the animals and birds, land, and other parts of nature are included in this sacred aspect. Samoa depicts an image of a very big family working together and sustained by a principle of Fa'a-Samoa indicated by the word *sa* (“thou shall not” or simply “prohibition” or “sacred”).

### *Aganu'u ma Agaifanua* – Traditions of Culture and Customs

Fa'a-Samoa, *aganu'u* and *agaifanua*, has become a true source of identity and inspiration for the Samoans, affecting everyday life, work and religion. Samoans have a communal way of life with little privacy. Generally, they do all their social activities together. More than any other Polynesian people, Samoans are tradition-oriented and follow closely the social hierarchies, customs and courtesies established long before the arrival of *papalagi*.<sup>16</sup>

The *fa'amatai* (system of government) is in effect throughout the islands of Samoa. Each village comprises a group of *aiga* which include as many relatives as can be claimed. The larger the *aiga*, the more powerful it can become, and to be part of a powerful *aiga* is the goal of nearly every traditionally-minded Samoan. The *matai* (chiefs) are responsible for law enforcement and punishment of infractions that may occur in their village *fono*.<sup>17</sup> Social etiquette is taken seriously and crimes such as

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<sup>16</sup> *Papalagi* is a term specifically for “white,” from two Samoan words *papa* (from *pa* “a loud bang” or “to break apart”) and *lagi* (heaven or simply white). The people of Samoa were shocked with the strange visit, but they received the strangers in peace and offered them food and drinks for their voyage. Part of the Samoan ancestral worship was the offering of food and drinks to their deities. From the context of the time and the event, the validity of this idea is affirmed due to the fact that Samoans at the time only experienced thunderstorms and lightning as wonders of the heavens. When they first set eyes on the “white men” they were amazed at the color of their skins, and the *papalagi* were initially looked at as the incarnation of the ancestral gods, based on prevailing religious assumptions, meant that the gods had revealed themselves in tangible forms and were making visitations to the land of the living.

<sup>17</sup> A council meeting of the village chiefs and talking chiefs. The *fono* governs the people of the village in two ways: supervises organized activities, the *aumaga* (an organization of untitled men) and the

murder, adultery, violence, insubordination and even defiant disrespect are punishable by all sorts of unpleasant rulings.<sup>18</sup>

All wealth and property in Samoa are owned communally by the *aiga*. European concepts of property and wealth are lost on the most traditional Samoans and looked upon with varying degrees of suspicion by others. Although materialism is rapidly encroaching on Samoans, visitors who can reconcile themselves to existence in a communal situation will be far happier in Samoa. Changes that have been in evidence of late are having profound effects upon the young regarding their *aiga*, villages, and roles in society, but in the villages, the old standard remains in effect for the time being.

The most important aspect of the traditional Samoan life is *fa'aaloalo* or *ava fatafata* (courtesy and respect) for those perceived to be higher than oneself. Children show respect for their parents, women for their husbands or husbands for their wives, and *tulafale* for the *alii*.<sup>19</sup> The main language spoken in Samoa is Samoan. Except in remote villages, those who don't speak the indigenous language should have few problems communicating to the Samoans.

Fa'a-Samoa has at least two referents: one, it refers to the fostering of a distinct

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*aualuma* (an organization of unmarried women and widows), and it controls individual activities.

<sup>18</sup> On August 1994, one of the most horrible news throughout the islands of Independent State of Samoa was the murder of a father and his two sons by the *aumaga* of the village of Malie. The father and his sons were ordered not to operate any bus business in the village during the *sa* (evening curfew) but they refused to obey (in addition to other charged infractions). The village chiefs then ordered the *aumaga* to strap up the father and his sons, bring them before the village council, and shot them. Moreli J. Niuatoa, "Euthanasia: The Right to Kill or Live," course paper for 201: Christian Ethics, Kanana Fou Theological Seminary, American Samoa, 17 Dec. 1994.

<sup>19</sup> The *matai* is a patriarch who directed all the activities of his household, both economic and social, whose members obeyed him and served him. A *matai* holds all authority for family affairs and communal lands. There are two distinct types of *matai*: *alii* (high chiefs) and *tulafale* (talking chiefs). A large extended *aiga* may have more than one *matai*, but one will be afforded the highest authority of the *aiga*. The honor of carrying the *aiga* title is either inherited or earned through service in the *aiga*. Most titles are held by men, but distributing the *aiga* resources, the *matai* must mediate conflicts, and as a role model and representative for the *aiga*, must carry the *aiga* name with pride and respect.

kind of community way of life; second, it refers to the study of system of beliefs and views in the normative claim of the community. Both references point to Fa'a-Samoa as a major source for spiritual formation, and social empowerment for the Samoan life. Many outsiders sense correctly that below the surface of Fa'a-Samoa lies a complex code of ethics and behavior in their dealings with Samoa. Fa'a-Samoa is closely preserved, especially in remote islands and villages where European influences are minimal.

### Primitive Samoan Worldviews with Significant Spiritual Overtones

The primitive worldview of Samoa is analogous to the worldview mirrored in the Bible.<sup>20</sup> In this perception, everything earthly has its heavenly partner, and everything heavenly has its earthly partner. Every earthly affair is thus a heavenly affair. If the villages wage war on earth, then there must be, at the same time, war in heaven between the lesser gods and the sovereign gods. Likewise, if war begins on earth, then there must be war in heaven between the angels. This is a symbolic way of saying that every earthly reality has a spiritual aspect, and every spiritual reality has an earthly outcome. This was a common belief held by the Samoans in the ancient times. That means that there is no reason that Samoan spirituality cannot be interpreted within the framework of Fa'a-Samoa today.

Samoan spirituality was practiced within the perspective of the common people. They were motivated by eschatological expectations and the transformation of Samoan life. Specifically for this reason, Samoans perceived the Samoan life as the most

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<sup>20</sup> Jesus' saying, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19 NRSV). The word "bind" and "loose" are rabbinic terms meaning "forbid" and "permit" some action. This is a clear biblical implication of earthly and heavenly counterpart.



comprehensive form of spirituality.<sup>21</sup> Chief Leasau stated that the spirituality of Fa'a-Samoa became apparent as a freedom movement, socially aiming towards well-being.<sup>22</sup> This movement was nurtured by contacts with the religious. In this relation, Samoans felt moved by the spirit of the gods. From then on, every aspect of Samoan lifeway offers the opportunity to conform oneself to the will of the gods. This is obvious in the service culture of Samoa in which the best is always given to the *matai* because they are considered to be *suli vaaia o le atua* (visible agents of the gods).

Samoan living traditions and myths disclose that almost all areas of Samoan life were directed and influenced by an awareness of the divine presence in the physical and the spiritual world. The Samoans considered the physical and spiritual worlds as living partners, sharing and interweaving in related functions and relationships for growth and survival. The land, sea, and sky were vital to the religious and cultural lifestyle of the Samoan people. They were viewed as major sources and advocates of life upon which other forms of the created order depend. Amaamalele Tofaeono argues, "They are a place where the womb of one's being is buried and a space where one interacts and co-exists in the web of life."<sup>23</sup> Tofaeono alluded to Fa'a-Samoa spirituality as one living in relationship with one another through sharing of a common interest for what one believes is the highest good.

Another significant characteristic of the ancestral worldview was the rhythm that

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<sup>21</sup> This is according to the claims by the Samoan traditional elders during discussion with the author on the issue of how spirituality of Fa'a-Samoa was practiced and nurtured. Many have claimed that the practice of Samoan spirituality has been enriched through contact with the Gospel and western civilization. Discussion with author, 7 Nov. 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Leasau Eseroma, discussion with author, 23 Sept. 1998, Kanana Fou, American Samoa.

<sup>23</sup> Amaamalele Tofaeono, Eco-Theology: Aiga, The Household of Life: A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa (Neuendettelsau: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 2000), 180.

empowered the organic process of life. The recurring understanding of time was signified by the appearance and continuous reappearance of the moon. The year was divided into twelve months and each month was given a name, usually after a god who would be honored in that month, and according to a series of divine experiences in the natural phenomena.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to the modern concept of time, Samoans recalled moments of historical and natural occurrences as important time indicators. The human being was not pressed by time but lived and enjoyed time as it came.

Fa'a-Samoa spirituality is also revealed in numerous accounts of creation.<sup>25</sup> To gain a clear understanding of creation narratives, we must research into Samoan oral traditions of creation—religion, the social structure and values involved, individuals and

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>25</sup> The author discovered that Samoa has diverse accounts of creation. The story of the Manu'a islands claimed that Tagaloa, the god who dwells in the illimitable void, made all things. He alone existed. When there was no heaven no people, no sea, no earth, he traversed the illimitable void; but, at a point at which he took his stand, up sprang a rock. He said to the rock, "Divide!" and the *lagi* (sky) was born. Again he spoke to the rock, and there were born in succession Tuiteelagi (the heaven raising god), immensity and space, and the palm of clouds. He spoke again and the male and female abysses were born, named Luao (the hollow abyss) and Luavai (the abyss of waters). Tagaloa spoke to the rock again, and there were born in succession Aoalala (a branching zoophyte), a male, and Ga'ogaoletai (a coral rock), a female; also *tagata* (man), spirit, heart, will and suspicion. This completes the list of the progeny produced by Tagaloa from the rock. But they were only floating on the surface of the sea, no stationary place had been assigned them. Tagaloa and the rock then made the following appointments: to heart, spirit, will and suspicion he said, "Enter ye into man." This is the cause of man's intelligence: he was named Fatu ma le Elele (Rock and the Earth). This was the first human pair: Fatu (Rock) was the woman, and Elele the man. See Margaret Mead, *Social Organization of Manu'a*, 149-51. The second story (e.g. Western Samoa, now Independent State of Samoa) claimed that the rocks married the earth, and the earth became pregnant. Salevao, the god of the rocks, observed motion in the moa or center of the earth. The child was born and named Moa, from the place where it was seen moving. Salevao ordered the umbilicus to be laid on a club, and cut with a stone; and hence the custom ever after on the birth of a man-child. Salevao then provided water for washing the child and made it sa, or sacred to Moa. The rocks and the earth said they wished to get some of that water to drink. Salevao replied that if they got a bamboo he would send them a streamlet through it, and hence the origin of springs. Salevao said he would become loose stones, and that everything which grew would be sa ia Moa, or sacred to Moa, till his hair was cut. After a time his hair was cut and the restriction taken off, and hence also the rocks and the earth were called Sa ia Moa, or as it is abbreviated, Samoa. Tagaloa of the heavens had two children—a son called Moa and a daughter called Lu. Lu made his escape, came running down to the earth, and named it Samoa. At one time the land was flooded by the sea, and everything died except some fowls and pigeons. The pigeons flew away, but the Moa, or fowls, remained and were made sacred by Lu, and not to be killed, and hence called the Sa Moa or preserve fowls of Lu. See Turner, *Samoa*, 10-15.

group lifestyle, and culture. This will help unveil some of the crucial elements of Fa'a-Samoa spirituality that are critical to the empowerment of Samoan Christians and educational ministry.

### Foafoaga – Tradition of Creation

Samoans thought of the existence of the world as being divinely given by the creator god Tagaloalagi, the first-born child of the heavenly marriage.<sup>26</sup> This existence was seen as a self-contained creation that comprised gods, humans and the created earth. The earth was flatly laid out and firmly rooted to the deep or the underworld by the creator god Tagaloalagi.<sup>27</sup> Malama Meleisea attempted to write a brief history of Samoa claimed:

Samoans envisaged the universe as a dome, ending at a horizon. The dome had many layers above where the gods lived...It was generally thought that the world was flat and that if ships sailed too far west, they would fall over the edge.<sup>28</sup>

The layers of the dome were seen as *lagituaiva* (ninth heaven), the ranging mountain-tops with nine layers. The mountain-tops were believed to be inhabited by each individual god, arranged according to their status, and the creator dwelled in the highest level, the *lagi tuasefulu* (the heaven of ten layers).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Known generally, however, the sky father Tagaloalagi who, in the beginning, dwelt alone in the heavens overlooking the limitless unbroken ocean. Tagaloa threw into the water a rock which became the island of Manu'a, then sent down a sea woman fashioned from another rock, and a vine for shelter. Anufe (maggots) on the rotting vine became the first people. Tagaloa was hailed as creator of lands, visitor of lands, and master builder of the universe.

<sup>27</sup> K.R. Lambie, "Tala Tuufa'asolo o Samoa," T.S., n.p, n.d., 11. According to the genealogy of Tagaloalagi, there was an intermarriage of the earthly pre-existent materials, from which issued Eleele (soil or land). This was followed by the marriage of the heavenly materials, which gave birth to Tagaloalagi, the ever-living being of the heavens.

<sup>28</sup> Meleisea et al., Lalaga: A Short History of Western Samoa, 42.

Seeing the universe as a dome which ended at a distant horizon reflects the close-minded perception of the Samoans in the past. As a community surrounded by waters, life was realized in relationships and close contacts with each other. Central to their lives was the cultivation of the land and the fishing of the sea. These activities were considered to be corporate networks that aimed at the social welfare and common good of all people. This kind of communal unity in almost every sphere of life meant that individualism was rarely experienced. The mutuality of communal living allowed for shared responsibilities and roles aimed toward security, peace, and the harmony of all members. Everything in the world was weaved-together in a web of reciprocal and organized connections. The ecological elements of the created divine order were recognized as a living part of the whole system. The survival of the whole human race depended upon the collaborative effort of the inhabitants. This collaborative was managed as “I-Thou” relationship basis.<sup>30</sup>

The point of “I-Thou” here is that all components of the surroundings were observed and respected as spiritual and sacred living participants. Human beings were not unique members inheriting a unique place in the cosmos; rather, humans were simply networking members. The human being found his/her true identity, not in the essence of his/her own being, but in association with other selves, including the natural environment and the gods. The influence of the gods over the Samoan world was great, and was one of the main reasons why the Samoans of old respected and honored life as a sacred entity.

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<sup>29</sup> This information is based on the myth of the primitive human being conveyed to the author by the chiefs and orators of Olosega, Manu’a, 22 Jan. 2004. The myth informs the bodily worldviews of the Samoan islands. The myth does not appear in any written document. This is due, presumably, to the unwillingness of the islanders to share their sacred traditions with early foreigners.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), 15.

Life itself was more than just living; it consisted of right relationships found on attentiveness to the presence and actions of the divine deities.

### Solo—A Living Myth: Preserving Spirituality of Samoan Traditions

*Foafoaga* is one of the “living oral traditions” of Samoa that mediates Samoan spirituality to future generations.<sup>31</sup> These traditions were considered sacred and are preserved in poetic structure called *solo*.<sup>32</sup> Samoan mythological traditions are well conserved in *solo*. To have a clear understanding of the words employed in a *solo* one must carefully examine the words or phrases to understand its etymological and mythological connotations and history.

T.A. Powell obtained from Fofu and Tauanu’u, two prominent talking chiefs of Ta’u, long creation chants which were sung on occasions of importance in the life of the Tuimanu’a, the king of Manu’a. These creation traditions were conveyed to the children of the Tauanu’u family. Obviously, they were responsible for safeguarding the traditions.<sup>33</sup> Powell reported that it was customary, in the past, to embody mythological ideas and records in *solo*. To verify the true validity and mythological essence of a

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<sup>31</sup> The concept of “living oral traditions” implies Samoan traditional custom lifeway that are cited and used on a daily basis by the Samoans when conversing or discussing important issues. The recitation or narration of these traditions brings new meaning of life and opens new windows of life opportunity to the hearers.

<sup>32</sup> *Solo* has several meanings. The meaning employed here is “an active epic poem handed down from ancient times.” But it also means “to move forward in a file,” “progress,” “collapse,” and “round about.” Its economic meanings are “towel” or simply “to wipe.”

<sup>33</sup> According to Powell, on the largest island of Manu’a cluster of Samoa, there resides a family (that of Tauanu’u) whose office it has been, from time immemorial, to guard these myths with sacred care, and, only on occasions of a royal tour (of Tuimanu’a) to rehearse them in public. They were taught to the children of the family with great secrecy, and a different parts of a myth and its song were committed to the special care of different members of the family; so that a young man would have the special care of the prose part and a young woman that of the poetic part, while to the older members, and especially the head of the family, belonged the prerogative of explaining the meaning of the various allusions of the poetic lines. For a detailed account see T.A. Powell, Samoan Tradition of the Creation and the Deluge (Wellington, NZ: Journal of the Polynesian Society, 1886).

history, it is crucial to obtain its *solo*.<sup>34</sup>

In the Western format of preserving history or important events of the past, they are narrated and recorded on paper. Unlike the Western style, Samoans have preserved and transmitted their history and significant events through memorization. Every word or story is passed from mouth of the father to the son's ear. On rare cases it was whispered silently by an elder to his son without anyone knowing, concluded with offering of blessing to him (or the successor of the family title). I have discovered that this is an expression of the male-centeredness of Samoan spirituality and traditions.<sup>35</sup>

In Samoa, the relationship between the speaker and the listener is a bond around Fa'a-Samoa: traditions and myths were never intent to corrupt instruction. Samoa has absolute confidence in its narrative speech, sure that their traditions and customs will reach the future Samoans with a claiming authority. Such narrative is a shared practice of spirituality of Fa'a-Samoa which stimulates creative thinking for the Samoan Christian educational ministry.

From this discussion we see glimpses of the spirituality of Fa'a-Samoa deeply imbedded in the ancient traditions of Samoa. This can be completely proven in the highly ceremonial lifeway of Samoa, in which almost all the ceremonies represented a ritual aspect of religion. These ceremonial aspects of ancient Samoan spiritual life and beliefs have clearly disclosed the mythological contexts and motifs of Fa'a-Samoa. The

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<sup>34</sup> The *solo* was anything but a really true repository of mythological truth. Its form was so indefinite that it could be broken up into half a dozen pieces. Each piece would seem equally coherent to those who heard it. So whenever there is a demand from the narrator, *tala mai le soifua* (tell me about life), it is a need to demonstrate the life or power of the tale by reciting the *solo*.

<sup>35</sup> Like the Israelite tradition, story was intended for the practice of the imagination. That is, there was no direct line of communication from the writer to the receiver. This means that the reader has as much freedom as the speaker in deciding what is happening. See also Walter Brueggemann, The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 24.

profound meanings of these aged rituals are well-preserved in Samoan living *solo*. These *solo* have also inspired the ideal world of Samoan well-being and its religious contact with the deity regarded as *tapuaiga*.

### Tapuaiga – Traditions of Religion

*Tapuaiga* (religion) is formed from two roots: *tapu*—to make sacred, or to place (something) under restriction; and *aiga*, which means extended family, a relative, a cohabitation, or people who are bonded in and through relations. In simple words, *tapuaiga* is a sacred family. *Tapuaiga* in short is *tapua'i*, which, in its sociological dimension, presents meanings such as “to abstain from (certain activities such as) work and sports; to sit waiting for success in war or in sickness; to give something to bring success; and to offer spiritual worship.”<sup>36</sup> G. Pratt contends that *tapuaiga* refers specifically to “certain villages which did not engage in war, but served as a refuge to those who fled in defeat.”<sup>37</sup> *Tapuaiga* in Samoa was never a separate entity of spiritual and cultural life.

The tendency to separate religion and culture only became a part of the Samoan life upon the arrival of the Christian religion. According to Aiono Fanaafi Le-Tagaloa, it was difficult to separate the secular from the sacred in the *tapuaiga* of Samoa. Only when the new religion (Christianity) finally took over the *tapuaiga* did it introduce, unconsciously, the secularism of Victorian England.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Tapua'i* is also used for Sunday worship. It refers to the “calling” of the congregation to come together in harmony to worship and praise God. *Tapua'i* suggests the beginning of any worship service in the Samoan Christian church; while *tapu* means “forbidden.”

<sup>37</sup> G. Pratt, “*tapuaiga*” in *Pratt's Grammar and Dictionary of the Samoan Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Apia, Western Samoa: Malua Printing Press, 1911), 362.

One can say that this meaning is based on the spiritual experiences associated with traditional warfare, whereby the gods were called upon for victory and success. Yet those who participated in the *tapuaiga* also remained neutral. In other words, they mediated and offered security by fostering harmony between the two opposing parties. The goals were not only to seek and create peace, but also to heal and comfort the victimized, defeated party, both spiritually and physically.

*Tapuaiga* also encompasses human and natural relationships. For instance, the term *tapunu'u* or *tapufanua* resembles the *pule* (authority) of sacred chiefs over the *aiga*.<sup>39</sup> This includes dutiful commitments to the land and the sea. This role was regarded as divinely sanctioned and therefore it must be carried out on good terms. Apart from that, the root syllable *tapu* (referring to sacred, restriction) contains several other meanings which are related to the natural world. For example, the word *tapu'e* provides meanings such as: “to heap up earth round yam,” or simply to nurture and give stability and growth to the trees, and “to catch.” In this sense, it especially refers to the catching of animals and birds (mainly pigeons), which was a religious sport of Samoan chiefs in the past.

Another aspect of the word *tapui* is “something hung up to denote trees from which fruit is not to be picked,” or to prohibit from picking fruit by hanging the *tapui* on the tree. The prohibition act is aimed at regaining the fertility of the trees. This act is sometimes accompanied by a *sa* (prohibition) whereby the entire village would refrain from harvesting certain food crops (or fish) until they are fully matured. The taking off

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<sup>38</sup> Aiono Fanaafi Le-Tagaloa, “Gospel, Culture and Communication,” paper presented to the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools, Piula Theological College, Samoa, Oct. 1993, 1-9. Le-Tagaloa was Professor of Samoan Cultural Studies at the University of Samoa.

<sup>39</sup> *Tapunu'u* means “village sacred principles” and *tapufanua* refers to “land sacred principles.”



of the *tapui* on trees is called *tapumau*, meaning to neutralize the taboo or something *tapu* to reduce the prohibition.

From these meanings and considerations, one can observe that, in Samoan *tapuaiga*, human cultivation plays an important role. Moreover, the concept includes both divine and human relations, which are affirmed, performed, and observed in social engagements and dealings of people, land, trees, animals, and birds. The *tapuaiga* in this sense, morally and ethically, shapes the society's distinctive way of life. There is no reference to private worship. Rather, the *tapuaiga* is performed within the context of the community for the well-being of all members.

Here we may presuppose that the content of Samoan spirituality can only be understood fully when it is viewed from its historical context. Fa'a-Samoa has been in existence for many generations. The safeguarding and communication of Fa'a-Samoa is a process that will last forever. Walter Brueggemann says, "By studying that process and its end result, we can learn much about the community's self-understanding and its intent for the coming generation."<sup>40</sup>

### Samoan Sacred Traditions of Land – *Tapu Eleele*

The special *tapu* which is characteristically Samoan and was regarded as the sacred or spiritual prohibition is that of the King Tuimanu'a (king of the Manu'a islands). The remains of food, hair clippings, and finger nail clippings from Tuimanu'a were sacred and precious. These remains could only be eaten by Tauanu'u, the father of *to'oto'o* (talking chiefs), otherwise they had to be thrown away, burned and buried, as did

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<sup>40</sup> Brueggeman, Creative Word, 3.

the hair and nail clippings. The bed of Tuimanu'a was so sacred that even his wife could not sleep on it. The talking chiefs of Manu'a revealed that "There is only one high chief in Samoa whose bed is so sacred that even his wife may not sleep on it."<sup>41</sup> High Talking Chief Malaepule stated that "Any one coming in contact with the clothes used by the Tuimanu'a would develop swellings which could be removed only by the touch of the Tuimanu'a's foot."<sup>42</sup> This removal ceremony, *fa'atapatapa* or *o le soliga*, suggests eastern affiliations with Fiji. According to George Turner, if any one lies on the bed of a Fijian chief or uses his clothes the supernatural efficacy of it infects the man so that he gets a swollen knee or belly. The chief touches the belly to remove the swelling.<sup>43</sup>

Chiefs Pinefa'amau and Tautala claimed this same sort of sanctity in a moderate degree. Swelling or sudden death was said to follow upon the consumption of the remnants of their food. As there were, however, no ceremonies reported by which this great danger could be obviated, this *tapu* is probably either a late copying of Tuimanu'a or a survival piece of an old, at one time more elaborate attitude.<sup>44</sup> The existence of this attitude towards the Tuimanu'a proves that the Samoans possessed in some degree the divine or spiritual attitude.

### Samoan Categories of the Forbidden

Because the verb *tapu* or its Samoan equivalent *sa* means forbidden, it is

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<sup>41</sup> Leasau Eseroma, Pouniu Laie, and Pinefa'amau Mata'u, discussion with author, 22 Feb. 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Discussion with author, 11 Jan. 2004.

<sup>43</sup> George Turner, Nineteen Years in Polynesia: Missionary Life, Travels, and Researchers in the Islands of the Pacific (London: John Snow, 1861), 34.

<sup>44</sup> Discussion with author, 20 Feb. 2004. It must be noted that the author also learned most of these prohibitions from his father—a respected political figure and high talking chief in the village of Olosega.

customary to discuss under *tapu* every type of prohibition and avoidance found in a primitive society. My discussion with the Samoan elders revealed some of these primitive prohibitions:

1. The most insignificant condition of manners against a man not holding the 'ava cup in the right hand if the next man on the right is nearer than the next man on the left.
2. The folk belief that it is bad fortune to take octopuses found paired in a particular fashion on a rock.
3. The theory that little children should not meddle with the belongings of their *matai*.
4. The prohibition against injuring and eating the family god; a village decree that no coconuts may be cut.
5. The social regulation that no chief but the Tuimanu'a might have a name for his 'ava cup.
6. The industrial ruling that a man might not hire new carpenters until he had paid the old carpenter in full.
7. The undesirability of talking of ghosts or telling family secrets at night when there was no telling who was near.
8. The prohibition against going to sea in boats when the Tuimanu'a lay dead.
9. The prohibition against touching the garments of the Tuimanu'a.<sup>45</sup>

Of each and all of these, the Samoan says *ua sa* (it is forbidden). Violators of some of them incur automatic supernatural penalties, some civil penalties, some parental

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<sup>45</sup> Discussion with the church elders, 13 April 2005.

penalties, some only the penalty of being thought a fool. They are comprised in the category of *o mea e le'i faia* (things which are not done).

The ways in which Samoa has used its linguistic categories in placing aspects of the new religion and government are illuminating. Samoa speaks of the church as *fale sa* (the forbidden house); the Bible as the *Tusi Sa* or *Tusi Paia* (the sacred book), Sunday as the *aso sa* (forbidden day). The term *paia* means sacred but not forbidden. Kramer says it refers to sanctity derived from persons. For Monday (*aso Gafua*) the Samoan uses his equivalent of the Maori *noa*, *gafua* (made free).<sup>46</sup> This word is hardly ever used in the Manu'an speech.

In addition to the *tapu* of the Tuimanu'a, it is *tapu* to touch the baskets in which stones have been carried to a grave, for any one but a sister or paternal aunt to touch the fan with which the corpse of a chief has been fanned, to eat a high chief's food, to shed blood on a taro plantation, or for a woman to make 'ava while menstruating. The result of infringing these scattered rules is illness or death.

There are also a group of prohibitions carrying specific automatic punishments. The expectant mother is forbidden to eat while walking about. Her penalty will be to have a runaway child. It is prohibited to make *tapu* dyes with anger in one's heart; penalty, the dye will be spoiled. These prohibitions are in the general class of popular beliefs about bad luck and hardly deserve the name of *tapu*.<sup>47</sup>

#### Lifting of Prohibitions – *Tatalaina o Tapu ma Sa*

The typical method of removing *tapu* is by sprinkling with water the person,

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<sup>46</sup> Kramer, *Ancient Samoan Culture and History*, 481.

<sup>47</sup> Mativa Tautala and Fa'avela Leatiota, discussion with author, 23 May 2004.

place, or object which has become sacred. After tattooing the newly tattooed were sprinkled and then permitted to bathe and mingle freely with the people. In Western Samoa high chiefs' titles were removed by sprinkling and the spot upon which a titled high chief had been sitting was sprinkled.<sup>48</sup>

On the islands of Manu'a there is no evidence of this sprinkling procedure. The coconut palm leaves laid across the entrance of a village at the death of a high chief were simply lifted when the period of mourning was passed. All occasions of Samoan activity are *sa*; *fa'alavelave* (interruptions), *tausua* (humor), *pisa tamaiti* (chattering children), and *tagata asiasi* (casual comer) are all forbidden. They are formal, important activities consecrated to the value the Samoan respects most—the formal social structure. No individual is important in himself. Only as individuals, places, or occasions are given importance by this unusual social restriction, must they be treated with respect; a respect which is now faithful etiquette, no longer *tapu*.<sup>49</sup>

In the Samoan culture, maintaining firm and healthful relationships is very important. Healthy family relations are what nurtures and enriches relationships between family members. In most cases, good family relation eliminates social or religious prohibitions. The Samoans deeply understand and embrace family relationships because they are what makes a family to reconcile and grow strong. The customs and traditions of Fa'a-Samoa are nurtured through shared religious and cultural practice in the family and village. In that matter, kinship of *aiga* is the important element that help nurtures Samoan spirituality.

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<sup>48</sup> Stairs, *Old Samoa*, 127.

<sup>49</sup> Tautala, Leau, Pine, Tuaifua, Moliipe, and Faleolosega, discussion with author and some of the matais in the village of Olosega, 26 Feb. 2004. The chiefs conferred that traditions and customs in Tutuila and Upolu are somewhat different from that of the Manu'a islands.

### Samoa Social Organization

The Samoan social organization is an integration and combination of several distinct principles: (1) the principles of hereditary rank, (2) the functions and privileges of relationship groups; and (3) the recognition of the organized village community with rights and privileges of its own. To understand the position and function of the individual in the Samoan community, I shall discuss the political and social structure as the Samoans conceive it in theory, and follow this account of the social structure to which their thinking is oriented by a description of the actual social structure and to which their behavior is necessarily adjusted.<sup>50</sup>

#### *Fa'avae Maopoopo* – Ideal Structure

All Samoan islands are represented in an ideal political structure, the *fono*. The *fono* is simply a pattern made up of names held in certain *aiga* in the village. Each name is assigned an arbitrary rank and a fixed place in an ideal circular plan corresponded to the posts in a Samoan *fale* (house). These fixed positions and the formal prerogatives of order of precedence in 'ava drinking or in the making of speeches come together in a series of formulas known as the great *fa'alupega* (the courtesy titles for the *fono*).<sup>51</sup>

The major distinction in class of rank is between the *alii* and the *tulafale*.<sup>52</sup> To the

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<sup>50</sup> The Samoans devised a social organization of their own which was admirably suited to their environment and their needs. This social structure still exists in the modern time, not influenced by western philosophy and ideal structure.

<sup>51</sup> *Fa'alupega* is the arrangement of phrases of ceremonial recognition to the *fono* itself, and to special names, or special categories in which numbers of names are arranged, which must be recited at the opening of any *fono*, large or small. Membership in the great *fono*, and in smaller *fono*, when all the villages of a district or an island are included, is not a question of the representation of the smaller unit in the larger, so that all the islands of Samoa would receive equal or even ranked representation in this ideal structure.

*alii*, high or low, belong certain courtesies: a different gesture for the 'ava ceremony, and a different *fa'alagiga* of address. To the *tulafale* belong certain prerogatives: notably, the right to address a *fono*, the right to preside over the distribution of food, and rights to receive presents from those of the chiefly class on certain stated occasions. *Alii* and *tulafale* are called *matai*, a holder of a title which gives a right to sit in the local *fono*. The holder of a *matai* title is usually the head of a household.

The blurring of the distinction between lowly members of either class is assisted by the use of another term, *fa'ava i pou* (sitting between the posts), which includes both classes and indicates lowly rank. In villages where each position may be filled by a substitute of the same kind of rank, the distinction between *tulafale* and *alii* is preserved more clearly in the ranks of the humbler *matai*. There are *tulafale* who outrank *alii* except in the ways in which etiquette provides a fixed procedure toward members of one order from members of the other. There are also occasional *tulafale* titles which carry with them the right to chiefly honors if no chief be present.

The *fono* ground plan is further divided in a number of segments and to each of these are attached special functions. Although some division is found in every *fono*, there are few constant elements. One section is set aside for the *alii sili* (prominent chiefs) who are grouped with him. Another section belongs to the *tulafale* whose function is to preside over the distribution of food. There is usually a large undistinguished section for titles of low degree in the rear of the circle, which is always carefully oriented with respect to the directions: *i tai* (toward the sea) and *i uta* (inland). Some titles simply carry

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<sup>52</sup> Although the term talking chief by no mean covers all the functions of a *tulafale*, this term with its German equivalent (*sprecher*) has been used so frequently in the literature that it seems best not to attempt to alter the usage.

with them a right to sit in this undistinguished section, but do not carry a right to a special post. The more important titles carry a right to a particular post, automatically locating the holder of the title in a particular section.

With certain high chiefly titles go two other titles and the right to name their holders. These two titles, *taupou*<sup>53</sup> (an unmarried girl in the chief's family) and *manaia* (the titular heir of the chief) are held in the relationship group and filled along lines laid down by the relationship system. Although several *matai* in a village may have *taupou* and *manaia* names, it is only the *taupou* and the *manaia* of the high chief of the village who are significant in the village structure. If the high chief has no *taupou* because he is poor, or because one *taupou* recently married and he delayed in appointing another, a *taupou* of lesser rank may take her place. Rank among *taupou*, of one village or of different villages, is strictly a function of the rank of the titles of which their *taupou* titles are functions. The *taupou* of the *alii sili* is regarded as the *taupou* of the whole village and as his rank has become an integral part of the *fono* structure, so also has hers. She is the village hostess who presides over the *fale talimalo* (guest house), makes the beds of important visitors, and prepares the 'ava on ceremonial occasions. Around the *taupou* is grouped the *aualuma* who serves in a double capacity, as the court of attendants of the *taupou*, and as institutionalized servers at the meetings of the *fale tama'ita'i* (wives of *matais*).<sup>54</sup>

In village life, the *manaia*'s actual functioning is immensely more important than that of the *taupou*. He is the acknowledged leader of the *aumaga*, the *malosi o le nuu*

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<sup>53</sup> *Taupou* is an esteem title of village maiden, a position held according to Samoan custom by a virgin single woman singled out for her charm, looks, and manners. Among her duties is the preparation of 'ava, one of the highest and respectable spiritual rituals in Samoa.

<sup>54</sup> Discussion with orators of Olosega village, 13 Feb. 2004.



(strength of the village). Upon the *aumaga* revolves not only the duty of cooking for and serving the *matai*, but also the cultivation of the village taro plantations and the heavy routine labor in any communal undertaking. The parallelism with the *fono* of chiefs is striking. A son of each important household sits in the place of his *matai*, and receives the courtesies and discharges the functions associated with that position. Whether or not the *aumaga* has its origin in the following of the chief's son, its institutionalization today is rather as the group of those who hold the lower status in the social organization.

### Contextual Foundations of Fa'a-Samoa: Ecology of Moral and Ethical Living

The unit of society in Samoa is the *aiga*.<sup>55</sup> In Samoa great importance is attached to the *aiga's* role in teaching the young about the Fa'a-Samoa. Learning the Fa'a-Samoa is the basic step to socialization. A good child is alert and intelligent and show respect, politeness, and obedience to elders and respect for Samoan custom and practices. The potential for learning these principles is partly genetic and partly social. The contexts for

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<sup>55</sup> In Samoa, *aiga potopoto* or extended families formed the main support structure of the entire community. Family members relied on each other for economic and physical support. In fact, almost all families in a Samoan village are related. Samoa does not have homeless people; neither does it have family-less people. Every Samoan has a family. The concept of being "poor" in Samoa is foreign. If a *aiga* is poor, it is not because they don't have food or material goods but because they are lazy and do not work. Samoa has all the necessary provisions for their existence and plenty of land spaces to grow plantations and raise livestock for the family. In fact, some families are shared owners of various plantations. The ocean is enormously prosperous with all kinds of fish or seafood available for everyone. One does not need a permit to fish. Every land along the coastline is openly available for anyone to cultivate or use for fishing.

Samoans *aiga* openly discuss issues or matters that pertain to individuals. Privacy is never an issue in Samoa, but any matters that require confidentiality are well-respected. However, the sanctity of that confidentiality is not honored by many Samoans today due to the influence of Western civilization. Today, things are privately discussed among family members. In the past, any issues that were related to a family were openly discussed among the family. This Samoan philosophy of open-discussion is the reminiscent of the Samoan lifestyle of open-living. It is not that they wanted others to see what they were doing, but it is the belief that "open air" brings good thoughts. This is evident in the visible configuration of all Samoan houses, open and approachable to all people. The Samoans believe that open-living is the key to *aiga maopoopo* or strong family bonding.

learning these important principles are *fuaifale*, *aiga*, and *nu'u*.

### *Fuaifale* – Household

*Fuaifale* consists of only one household—a father and mother and their children. The interweaving of more than one *fuaifale* establishes an *aiga*—the extended family. The word is constituted of two Samoan roots: *fua* and *fale*.<sup>56</sup> Literally, *fua* means “to measure” or “to weigh.” The space between houses is measured to designate *tuaoi* (border lines or boundaries). In its cognitive sense, *fua* means “to evaluate” or “to contemplate” on an issue; it also means to weigh the tie-beams of the house which refers to philosophical thinking.

*Fuaifale* (the basic body of Western society) serves as a sub-group of the

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<sup>56</sup> *Fale* means “house” (or home) and cannot be restricted to a single symbolic definition. The most immediate symbols associated with *fuaifale* (household) were *fale* and *vaa* (canoe or boat). Traditions disclose the origin of these arts as associated with the creator god Tagaloalagi who gathered a *fuaifale* to a *fono*, planned and decided on the size and the type of *fale vaa*, then drink their ‘ava, before leaving with the carpenters to start work. These arts are both technologically and sociologically vital elements in Samoan culture. They are legitimized by the beliefs in spirits and practiced by a variety of religious ceremonies and rituals. The two arts in formal speech are called *sa* (sacred). The *fale* which Samoans use today for church worship, for instance, is called *fale sa*.<sup>56</sup>

*Fales* were built specifically for *vaa*. *Vaa* was one of the most important medium of communication in Samoa, besides its ordinary use in the operation of the subsistence fishing economy. Since success and failure in these activities were connected to beliefs in spiritual guardians, the *vaa* was, as well, conceived as one of the significant arts of life. A *fale* denotes and expresses *aiga*. It bespeaks the order, character and confines of the world of *aiga*. The existence of *fale* recalls the status and rank, history and meaning of a certain *fuaifale*, ranging from the deities that inherit the locality, the name and the story of the place, the family title related to it, family members, together with the account of living components (like stones, trees, rivers, and mountains.) that define the boundaries of the settlements. The decision to build a *fale* depended primarily on the approval of the hosts of gods. The gods were consulted not only for the authorization of the house foundations and the materials used in the work, but were also called upon to impart the divine gifts of wisdom and strength to the *matua o faiva* (leading builder, usually an old man) and the *aiga sa le malama* (sacred family of wise-builders). Traditionally, *fale* were built on a raised stone foundation, in oval-round shapes, and with openness of spaces inside and outside. The construction of *fale* coincides with the act of worship. This means that while the builders and able members of the community participate in the building work, other members, especially elderly members (constituted of chiefs) simultaneously offer worship, calling upon the blessings of the gods for guidance, protection and strength. Besides the ordinary worship, official ceremonial acts of worship were offered after each main part of the *fale* was completed. The deities of the *aiga* were sought after while the community obediently cooperated in the construction. See also Robert W. Williamson, Religion and Social Organization in Central Polynesia, ed. Ralph Piddington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937).

extended family, the primary social organization in the Samoan life. Since the *fuaifale* provides the basic foundational support for the extended family, its role and function is important. In the *fuaifale*, the groundwork is laid for members to learn how to respect the elders. It is here that a child learns the rules of courtesy and proper manners. It is here that a child learns the correct language to use when addressing an elder and how to behave before a titleholder. It is in the *fuaifale* that the children learn the proper way to sit, to speak, to walk, to lie down, to eat, to drink or to carry on a conversation with their seniors. Also, it is here that a child learns the value of sharing, the importance of mutual cooperation and caring for their *aiga*.

From birth until the age of five or six, a child's education is exceedingly simple. They must be housebroken. They are educated to sit or crawl within the house and never to stand upright unless it is absolutely necessary, never to address an adult in a standing position, to stay out of the sun, not to touch the *tanoa 'ava* or the *ipu 'ava* (kava bowl and cup), and, if their father is a *matai*, not to sit or crawl on his bed-place. These are simply a series of negative commands, enforced by occasional spanking. By the time the young Samoans have reached their adolescence, these long-lived admonitions have become an inseparable part of their lives.

From the age of seven to eighteen (or older) boys are taught to clean their sleeping mats and to prepare the food for cooking, such as skinning bananas, husking coconuts, or scraping taro. In the *tunoa* (cooking hut) they learn to make *palusami* (coconut milk mixed with taro leaves). They must learn to lace a large fish into a palm leaf, or roll a bundle of small fish in a breadfruit leaf, to select the right kind of leaves for stuffing a pig, and to judge when the food in the oven of small heated stones is

thoroughly baked.

In the *fuaifale*, the girl's principle task is to learn to weave. During her childhood, she has to master several different techniques. First, she learns to weave palm branches where the central rib of the leaf serves as a rim to her basket or an edge to her mat and where the leaflets are already arranged for weaving. Then she learns to weave the blinds which hang between the house posts. More difficult to weave are the *tapaau* (floor mats), woven of four great palm leaves and the food platters with their complicated designs. Usually, some older woman in the *fuaifale* trains a girl to weave and sees to it that she makes at least one of each kind of article.

Moreover, one of the girl's important tasks is the weaving of the *ie toga*<sup>57</sup> (fine mat). The *ie toga* represents the high point of Samoan women weaving skills. It forms the unit of value and must always be included in the *falamoe* (gifts or property brought by a bride to her husband) of the bride. Girls seldom finish an *ie toga* until they are nineteen or twenty, but the mat has been started, wrapped and rests among the rafters as a testimony to the girl's industry and manual skill.

Throughout this more or less systematic period of education, children learn social customs, the duties of a citizen, and economic skills by imitating their elders and through constant verbal instruction from older sisters and brothers who are charged with

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<sup>57</sup> Discussion with the chiefs of Olosega, 22 Jan. 2004. The term "fine mat" is not an accurate English translation for the word *ie toga*, the most valued possession of the royal families in Samoa. It fails to describe the true value of the sacred ceremonial robe as the Samoans see it. *Ie toga* is never used as a mat; it never was and it will never be. It is often said among the Americans that a person can buy anything with money, and that is true in many cases. But the Samoans can buy several acres of land and save a condemned person with one *ie toga*. Besides those, there are now among the royalties of Samoa very old *ie o le malo* (government-approved robes) that can never be bought with money. The wealth of the chief is measured according to the number of *ie toga* he has and the history attached to each robe in his collection. It is the most precious medium of exchange in Samoa according to the Samoans. Valuable belonging to kings and high chiefs while they were alive have been buried with them in their graves when they passed away, even if they were made of gold or diamonds, according to an ancient custom. The *ie toga* has never been subjected to that treatment. Burying of *ie toga* with the dead has never been permitted.

supervising the young. At this stage of education in the *fuaifale*, schooling is mostly done through observation, listening, and practice. This is the most exciting stage of education in Samoa.

From the above discussion, *fuaifale* “household codes”<sup>58</sup> for its organization were the framework in which the life and faith of the Samoans are centrally nurtured and sustained. As an institution, is the basic unit that serves to provide the needs of the *aiga*. The cohesiveness of the *fuaifale* depends on the sense of loyalty to the household, which stemmed directly from common economic, psychological, social and religious factors. The *fuaifale* provided members with a sense of security and identity that the larger Samoan political and social structures were unable to give. Here the relations between the parent and child are all conducted in a formal manner. When they address each other, words are carefully selected to maintain the social order and ensure peaceful living.

#### *Aiga Faitele – Extended Family*

The concept *aiga* constitutes the wholeness of Samoan life. It has bonded the divine and the ordinary into a synthesis of existence. As has already mentioned, *aiga* means extended family—a community of blood, of close or distant relations. On the simplest level, it signifies relationships of people, a social unit in a village where a *matai* directs its religious, economic, and political affairs. Each *aiga* is a self-sustaining economic group; members (including the head) cooperatively contribute the rewards of their hard work for the common good of the entire *aiga*.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> This conceptual phase was coined by Philip H. Towner, “Households and Household Codes,” in Dictionary of Paul and his Letters: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 417-19.

<sup>59</sup> Susan J. Bousseau, Fa’a-Samoa: Yesterday and Today (N.p.: Los Angeles County Office of

In a more general sense, *aiga* incorporates the communal ties with the gods, the ancestors, as well as the divine heritages, the sea, land, and the sky. In its inclusive sense, *aiga* could be conceived as a descent group or kinship in all its dimensions. Etymologically, *aiga* implies three main emphases. First, it means cohabitation,<sup>60</sup> which is a neutral relational concept, referring to a group of persons being associated into a single whole. In an immediate sense, *aiga* refers to a relational web of generations who trace the origin of their existence to the ancestors, and to the family of the gods, spirits, or the deities. Such an existence is sanctified by the presence of the gods, and is also legitimated by their representation in nature, including human beings, most importantly the *matai*. Every *aiga* has a *matai* who acts as the seer of the family. Additionally, each *aiga* has a *fa'alupega*, a formal expression of respect associated with chiefly titles.

The term *aiga* also contains biospheric overtones. For instance, when the word is pronounced with an emphasis on the first syllable '*ai* and the vowel "a" at the end *a'iga*, the term recalls geographical meanings such as being settled, or being at home in a definite space and place.<sup>61</sup> This means a community of living beings and their biogeographical place which are blended into a network of relations, communicating and interacting in natural ways. In this sense, they are not only related to the roots of their existence, but they find familiarity and comfort in the ground of their belongingness.

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Education; Sacramento: Office of Criminal Justice Planning, 1993), 18.

<sup>60</sup> The term contains overtones of coherence, unity, wholeness, and the like. See Oxford Dictionary of Current English (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>61</sup> The use of the word '*aiga* (with an apostrophe emphasis at the beginning) further changes the meaning of the word from cohabitation to the act of eating and is associated with the eating culture of Samoa. It suggests the collection and redistribution of food or sharing in a ceremonial meal. This recalls a ritualistic aspect of *tapuaiga*<sup>61</sup> in the sense of offering and celebration. To engage in the act of eating means mainly to partake in the essential acts and processes of life. Here, every member who is cohabitating needs to eat and to drink in order to maintain life. The *aiga* in this sense refers not only to the nurturing, sustaining and continuity of the life of the whole habitation, but also to a celebration of the gifts of life through festivities and feasting.

*Aiga* is a center for nourishment and sustenance whereby every member comes into relational and sustaining fellowships. Every part of the *aiga* is sustained and generated by an interdependent web of sustaining richness of a specific locality, and every member is entitled to share in its blessings. All of these units trace their existence to the spirits, ancestral gods, or the wellsprings of life.

As is the *fuaifale*, *aiga* has helped in shaping our communal world-based viewpoint, as well as our religio-cultural course of life. The concept *aiga*, in its cultural sense, denotes a living organism: although bonded to a certain contemporary locality, it extends its horizons to the well-springs of life—the gods, spirits, and ancestors—and simultaneously foresees the continuity and the future of the life of the *aiga*. *Aiga* defines a collective identity and character of *fuaifale*, sharing in common the gifts of creation that are closely connected with God and the Spirit. *Aiga*, therefore, is the primary context where Samoan spirituality and lifestyle is cultivated and nurtured. It is an institution and a concept which informs the life of the Samoan community in all its dimensions.

In institutional terms, *aiga* is depicted as a micro-unit, a web of interacting ecosystems yet with a variety of levels of integration, a sense of unity, diversity and identity that nurtures its very existence. Its life depends on a web of interdependent relationships that influence, sustain, reconcile, and increasingly generate the process of life. It manifests a sacred awareness and practices for the nurturing of life which are validated by intimate affiliations of God and all members of the created world. It illustrates a search by individuals and groups for deeper and more personal relationships and interactions with the deities, or for a richer spirituality and a more balanced lifestyle.

In short, *aiga* is like a growing mango tree, including the newly emerging off-

shoots and leaves, branches, stems and roots, which find strength from life-giving and nurturing “parent earth.”<sup>62</sup> From it genuine Samoan spirituality, like art, is open and dynamic, both are the hope of a Samoan so badly in need of transformation.

### Nuu – Village Organization

The *nuu* is the center of Samoan life. Each *fuaifale* and *aiga* joins hands with others for the everyday needs like sharing food, helping to build a house or even raising children. While the success of the *nuu* is foremost, the well-being of each individual is considered essential. Problems and crises are solved as groups, either by the *aiga* or the *nuu*.

The *matai* system extends as a system of authority from the *fuaifale* and *aiga* level to the *nuu* level. A *nuu* is a larger community, encompassing *fuaifale* and *aiga*, but more abstractly, could mean “community” in the sense of the larger community of Samoans in Los Angeles. A *nuu* may consist of many *fuaifale* combining into several *aiga*, each with its own *matai*, but each village also has its own *alii sili*, its own series of *tulafale sili* and the common chiefs. All chiefs in the *nuu* are members of a council that holds *fono* to make rules and decisions to protect the community. Disputes involving more than one *aiga* are resolved through a mediation process conducted during a *fono*.

The *nuu* establishes a hierarchy of authority designating an *alii sili*. The other *matai* can improve their status, and thus the status of their *aiga*, through service to higher-ranking *matai*. The village *alii sili* acts as an ambassador of the *nuu* in interactions with other villagers, businesses, church and political systems, including

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<sup>62</sup> The concept “parent-earth,” in contrast to mother-earth, is used here intentionally. This is not to dishonor the meaning of the latter; rather, it is based on the nature of the Samoan ancestral society. This is evident in the Samoan creation narratives which also include the founding and naming of the islands.



overseas involvements.

In the *nuu* setting, individuals begin to relate well to one another, influence each other, and conceive of one another. In this setting, individuals are required to work in groups—like the *aumaga* (an esteemed group of untitled men known as the backbone of the village) and *aualuma* (a group of unmarried women; their major responsibilities are weaving and household chores). The *aualuma* are concerned with educating the women about their responsibilities in the *nuu*.

The boys (at the age of 18 or older) are thrust into the *aumaga*. In the *aumaga*, the youth are given much more stimulus to learn. They must become house-builders, fishermen, orators or wood-carvers. Proficiency in some technique sets each young man off a little from his fellows. Skill in house-building means wealth and status, for a young man who is a skilled carpenter must be treated as courteously as a chief and addressed with the chief's language—*matua o faiva* or *agai o tupu*, the elaborate set of honorific words used for people of rank.<sup>63</sup> If he is proficiently talented, the *fono* itself may search out a vacant title to confer upon him and call him in that he may sit with the old men and learn wisdom.

These three major foundational contexts of Fa'a-Samoa are the primary settings for fostering and maintaining Samoan spirituality. The foundations for life, relationships, religious, and cultural values are effectively recognized and sustained here.

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<sup>63</sup> These two Samoan titles are important to the Fa'a-Samoa. The concept *agai o tupu* consists of two Samoan syllables: *agai*, "be in attendance on" or "look after" (especially a bowl of 'ava while it is being prepared and served) and *tupu* refers to "king." *Agai* is the group of men who look after or be in attendance to the king. On the other, *matua o faiva* also consists of two syllables: *matua* meaning "the elder" or "the leader" of a group; it also means "ripe"; and *faiva* means "skill in manual work" or simply skills in "fishing." Literally, it means "master builder." Discussion with the chiefs of the village of Olosega, 12 Feb. 2004.

### Economic Characteristics of Samoa

The economic conditions of Samoa must be understood against the background of economic plenty. Only in times of great disaster, such as the destruction of crops and houses by a hurricane, is there poverty in the island. No one lives below a comfortable subsistence level. All have sufficient food and clothing and shelter.

In Samoa there is no winter, no lean season, no period when sparing and saving are necessary. Where tasks are simple, the youngest and the weakest can render some service. Where wants are few this service is usually equal with the benefit received. The social system is such that those classes who ordinarily become economic problems elsewhere do not become such in Samoa. Crime was a serious offense against one's village, and could even mean losing the privilege to live there. However, kinship is traced through many villages, any one of which provides a base for a new economic start. The unmarried mother does not forfeit her claims upon her parents' land. The illegitimate child inherits its mother's rights. The divorced wife and the widow return to labor in the plantations of their kin. No one is homeless, without a place to plant and harvest.

#### Divisions of Labor – *Tiute ma Fatuaiga*

The division of labor which is of importance to the mere physical well being of the people is the division of labor along sex lines. Every man knows how to build a small house, how to hew out a rough canoe, how to make a coconut cup, or carve a *tanoa* (food bowl). The carpenters are carvers, and makers of 'afa (sennit lashings) are essentially specialists, called in for important occasions. But upon the balance of men and women

workers within a household, and upon their skill in the usual tasks in which every adult is supposed to be proficient, depends the prosperity of the household.

All work with wood, such as house building, canoe building, making household utensils, the making of sennit lashings, and netting is men's work. The men clear the ground for a new sugar cane or paper mulberry plantation. They carve the wooden mallets for beating the bark, provide the easel for scraping the bark, and shape the smooth log for beating it. They provide the piece of an old canoe for a board on which the scraps are patched together. They carve the wooden *upeti* (pattern boards) which have replaced the old ones of pandanus. The cultivation and preparation of the materials for mats and *tapa*, the plaiting of thatch, blinds, platters, the finer baskets and fans, the fine mats used for ceremony, and the making of *tapa* are exclusively women.

Fishing, agriculture, and the preparation of food are divided between men and women. Men make the fishing tackle for line fishing, weave eel traps, make the ropes for lassoing sharks, and do all fishing which requires going beyond the reef either by diving or in a canoe. Women do the daytime reef fishing except the fishing for eels and help in the village fish traps. Both men and women participate in torch light fishing at night.

#### Property and Wealth – *Fanua/Laueleele ma Tamaoaiga*

Property may be considered as land and all other properties or in the terms most hospitable to the Samoan, as *fanua* (land), property used as *toga* (gift), and property used as *oloa* (bride price). The regulations relating to *fanua* are somewhat different from those governing the use and disposal of other types of property.

The village *fono* retains jurisdiction over all the *fanua* within its titular limits, which may far exceed the limits of cultivation. Any one holding land within these limits

is subject to a village levy upon his crops or upon his labor. Regular taxes of course, did not exist in the old Samoa. Their place was taken by assessments for food to entertain visitors; mats and bark cloth to provide a dowry for the chief's *taupou*. When a guest house was being built each household might be assigned a section between two posts. For this they must provide breadfruit wood, hibiscus wood, sennit for lashing, sugar cane sewed into thatch, and palm leaf blinds.

The *malae* (village green), which keeps but a shadow of the prestige and none of the sanctity of the *marae* of southern Polynesia, is a large space, several acres in extent, and is the nominal property of the high chief.<sup>64</sup> From this land the village may select a site to present to the new wife of a chief. This, *o le fanua o le tama'ita'i* (the place of the lady), belongs to her heirs forever, subject to the legal jurisdiction of the village.

Individual ownership of land is rare and foreign. Control of all the land of his descent group is vested in the *matai*, subject only to the veto power of the female line. Land can be alienated by him if he obtains the consent of the descent group. The most frequent cause for alienation is the exchange of property at marriage.

Land is sometimes loaned. As this procedure is marked by a feast or a present of food, it might be said to be rented, although in the native conception it is said to be "given temporarily." It is only loaned for temporary crops which are soon harvested; never for a more permanent crop like bananas. All the produce of the land, the trees, and the red earth used for dye belongs to the owner of the land. Travelers are permitted to refresh themselves freely from plantations through which they pass, but to carry nothing

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<sup>64</sup> The concept *marae* is the Maori name for village greens. In Samoa, it is *malae tele* or *malae taalo* (a large open space in the middle of a village). Such a *malae* is of high religious and social importance.

away. Trespassing is punished by the village, usually by a fine of which part is paid to the owner and part kept by the village. Trespassing pigs may be killed on sight; the pig's owner, known by the brand on the pig's ear, is then notified to come and take away his dead pig.

All important property is the property of the descent group (only blood related members considered). The implements and utensils of daily use, such as ordinary floor mats of *tapa 'au* (palm leaves), *fala* (mats), pillows, food bowls, digging sticks, picking rods, and coconut cups, are regarded rather as household property. Personal property is practically non-existent. The *matai* may enforce upon his household a strict respect for his belongings, but a relative of higher rank or a paternal aunt may help herself from his most cherished possessions. The *alii* alone can preserve his private possessions intact. The *fala* upon which a chief sleeps are marked; a brother's effects are kept separate from a sister's, and that is all.

### Summary

As we can see from what was discussed, Samoan spirituality is a life of relatedness and conscious involvement in the process of life towards the highest good. Samoan spirituality derives from the experience which the Samoans make accessible by way of mediations (religious and cultural life). This experience gives identity to one's spiritual life within a given socio-cultural context, and forms the standard of validation in the event of reforms. Samoan spirituality is born within the culture of which it is a part, and retains its spiritual identity for as long as the experience remains alive in it.

Samoan spirituality has become a true source of identity and inspiration, affecting

Samoans' everyday life. It is a traditionally evolved, established community of language, economic life, and mental makeup manifested in its religio-cultural norms. Fa'a-Samoa and what it is, has been explained in many eloquent ways—the essence of being Samoan. The extent of what the Fa'a-Samoa entails is vast and often unexplainable. Samoan spirituality is a common language that stands for expression; this expression has to be done with symbols. Fa'a-Samoa is this symbolic expression. Fa'a-Samoa as expression is connected with your total being that is a combination of your physical body and your psyche. Your physical body comes from your parents, who contribute to you with their genes. Thus every Samoans carries some expressions in his own DNA-molecules, which is the experience and life of Fa'a-Samoa to which one belongs.

We have also seen that Fa'a-Samoa includes a unique attitude towards fellow human beings, unique perceptions of right and wrong, the Samoan heritage, and fundamentally the combination of everything that Samoans have learned during their experience as a distinct race. Fa'a Samoa is founded on mutual sharing and selflessness. It dictates the way in which Samoans view themselves in relationship to the world. The heart of Fa'a-Samoa is the *aiga* and strong identification with *aiga* is basic to the Samoan concept of self.

Fa'a-Samoa can also serve as discipline for the Samoans. When Samoans are faced with real-life challenges, Fa'a-Samoa becomes a sanctuary or safe haven for the Samoans. It provides disciplines and guidance and knowledge for the Samoans to cope with difficult issues in life. Fa'a-Samoa integrates cultural disciplines and Christian spiritual values to help Samoans deal with life, from love to relationships, from unity to individualism, and from family values to dysfunctional relationships.

The next chapter will discuss Fa'a-Samoa as code of conduct for Samoan spirituality. It shows how Fa'a-Samoa's ceremonial and religious life becomes that "sacred discipline" for inspiring Samoan hearts and minds in their attempt to live and practice Samoan spirituality.

## CHAPTER 3

FA'A-SAMOA AS CODE OF CONDUCT OF SAMOAN SPIRITUALITY: CUSTOMARY  
LIFEWAY OF SAMOA

Chapter two discusses the historical expression and implications of the Fa'a-Samoa values and religious beliefs. It looks at Fa'a-Samoa as a paradigm for expressing spirituality. This chapter provides a description of Fa'a-Samoa as code of conduct for the Samoan spiritual life; it analyzes significant Samoan customs to help us better understand self-esteem, loyalty and obligations, family and village dynamics, support systems, and well-being. It looks at Fa'a-Samoa as the very source of our being to help provide social and religious norms; provide examples of the conditions of Fa'a-Samoa, possibilities and limits of our knowledge gaining processes that lead towards a Samoan worldview. Fa'a-Samoa is the illustration of Samoan religio-cultural values—the means of inspiration that are aimed at religious education and the engagement of the Samoans in the normative claims of the community.

Fa'a-Samoa is the means—both theologically and psychologically—of inspiring and communicating spirituality that may have originally been oral in form but was transformed and now we encounter it in cultural forms. Fa'a-Samoa obviously points beyond itself to a reality for which it stands.<sup>1</sup> Traditions and customs of Fa'a-Samoa provide community guidelines of moral and ethical conduct and inspiration for Samoan lifeway. Fa'a Samoa provides community norms and ethos of how one should live life in respect to the “life culture” of the entire Samoan community. Fa'a-Samoa is our

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<sup>1</sup> Words in Fa'a-Samoa are language symbols for meaning which they express. The word *fale* (house), for example, is a language symbol which points to something quite different, namely, the thing in which Samoans live. This has nothing to do with the word *fale*, with these particular four letters. But the word *fale* has power to inspire its own meaning and reality.



lifeway—who we are, what we do, how we do it, and where we come from. It is only through knowing and practicing the customs and traditions of Fa’a-Samoa that one will be inspired to explore the profound meaning and essence of Samoan spirituality.

### Significant Ceremonial Lifestyle of Samoa: Guiding Principles

Before the dawn of Christianity, Samoa had its own unique life system guided by the principles of land, air, and sea. These principles are instrumental in the shaping of their daily lives and relationships with one another. Samoans’ social welfare and religious beliefs are safe guarded and governed by these principles. The ceremonial lifeway of Samoa is administered by the Fa’a-Samoa, through daily rituals and activities.

Fa’a-Samoa rituals of ‘*ava*, *ifoga*,<sup>2</sup> and *tapuaiga* are fundamental to the inspiration of Samoan spirituality. Underneath the core values and moral principles of these rituals, the true reality and meaning of Fa’a-Samoa is buried, which is a life of mutual respect and shared responsibility for inspiring the well-being of the community. They expose activity which implies an awareness of tasks and Samoan social deliberations in cultivating the interests of the community.

The Samoans claimed that Fa’a-Samoa was spiritually inspired and created for the benefit of the entire community. Implications and glimpses of the divine are made manifest in the Samoan religio-cultural heritage. The Samoan ceremonial rituals and gatherings are always begun in a form of thanksgiving ritual to the god Tagaloa. Fa’a-Samoa inspires the participants to reverent the ritual as a communication medium to the deities. This is evident in the continuous effort of the Samoans to value the practice of

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<sup>2</sup> A name given to a ceremonial request for forgiveness made by an offender and his kinsmen to those injured. In most cases, a whole village humbles itself before another village it has insulted.

Fa'a-Samoa.

Samoaan ceremonial occasions are of two sorts: one has its type in the *fono*, or formal gathering. The other in the *malaga* (a group from a neighboring or a far away village). The first type is the gathering of *matai*, or of all members of an *aiga*, or of all the people of the village. The focal point of interest is upon the purpose of the gathering. The second type of interest focuses upon the reciprocity between two groups, upon the initiation of an activity by one group, the privilege of visitor and the duty of host.

The ceremonies centered on meetings between two groups might be further classified as those in which hospitality is the main concern, and those transactions in which reciprocity of gifts or of services, or an exchange of gifts or services are the occasion for the ceremony. The hospitality type has its roots in the simple custom of welcome extended by the individual household to the visitor of rank, and culminates in the great *malaga*, in which all the people of rank of one village visit another village.

Within the hospitality picture there is no emphasis upon urgent return. The gifts which the visitors give are purely formal and entirely unequal to the amount of food which they consume. The reciprocity will be completed in a return visit on some future occasion. Of these ceremonial occasions the *malaga* and the *fono* are the most multifaceted. And when with the *malaga* there is conclusion of some important deals, such as a proposal of marriage to the *taupou*, a wedding, the exchange of property incident to the birth of the first child of a high chief, the feast which will mark the close of a period of mourning, or the strange *ifoga*, the social interest is at its height.

Certain ceremonies are highly regarded as esteem examples of Samoaan spirituality because of their inspirational and spiritual motifs in which that are closely

associated with them. These ceremonies help invoke and inspire Samoans to empathize with one another, help to inspire what is ethically and morally good, and help to invoke our thoughts about human life. There are three primary Samoan ceremonies discussed here are: '*ava*, *ifoga*, *tapuaiga*.

### 'Ava Fa'atupu – Covenant of Relationship

'*Ava fa'atupu* is the most sacred of the traditional Samoan ceremonies that have continued into the present.<sup>3</sup> In a sense, the '*ava* rightly forms an inspiring covenantal bond between the participants and the gods. It is a central ritual of respect for ancient traditions that is performed at significant events and for welcoming important guests. No formal gathering, no initiation or completion of work, no ceremony of validation, and no moment of crisis is complete without an '*ava* ceremony.

The '*ava* ceremony implies the presence of at least one *matai*, or a large formal gathering of the *aumaga* or of the women and girls in connection with a *malaga*. '*Ava* is made near the rear of the house, or if the ceremony is held on the *malae*,<sup>4</sup> in the inland

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<sup>3</sup> The '*ava* itself is a beverage made with the dried and pulverized root of that shrub mixed with water. Though intoxicating, it is drunk exclusively in honoring newly arrived distinguished guests during the welcoming ceremony. To ensure that the beverage is not abused by untitled men, they stay in the possession of the *matai*, reserved for their intended purposes. They are cycled among the *matai* and are only made into '*ava* when the *matai* meet. The first '*ava* ceremony, according to the Manu'a people, was conducted at the Matasaua (also Saua) by Pava and Tagaloa Ui (son of the god Tagaloalagi). In the old days, the *taupou* pounds the '*ava*, mixed it for the chiefs. According to high talking chiefs Talafa'auto Lo'a and Utagamamao Niuatoa, in the past, '*ava* was formerly chewed, made, and served by girls past puberty or by unmarried boys who were members of the tattooed division of the *aumaga*. The pulverized root is collected in a fresh breadfruit leaf, carried into the house in the hand and poured into the bowl. In the high '*ava* ceremony only boys were permitted to officiate, and at the '*ava* of the Tuimanu'a (the king of Manu'a). Today, the '*ava* is no longer chewed but is pounded outside the house on the *ma'a tu'i 'ava* (pounded bowl made of rock). Discussion with author, 25 Dec. 2005.

<sup>4</sup> *Malae* is a designated place in a village purposely established for the village chief's *fono*. The high chief of the village usually resides at this sacred place. Every Samoan village has one (for the larger villages, usually two). In the ancient Samoa, the *malae* is usually the center of the village gather, especially when prepare for war. Normal village events are not usually conducted at the *malae* accept for the welcoming of visitors or political and religious leaders from outside.

segment of the circle. The *taupou* or the youth who makes the 'ava sits directly behind the *tanoa* 'ava (bowl); the *sui* 'ava (assistant who manipulates the waters) sits at her right; the *tautu* 'ava (cup bearer) sits at her left, and a *tama ta [safu] fau* (third assistant who clean the strain) stays outside the circle to shake out the strainer as it becomes clogged with bits of 'ava root. These four (technically known as *aiga o le* 'ava) carry the paraphernalia into the house, entering in single file at the front and passing to the left of the central pillar. The 'ava root is brought in separately. The talking chief who presides over the ceremony sits at the officiant's left. On informal occasions one assistant who passes the 'ava as well as pouring the water is sufficient, but upon formal occasions there must be two assistants within the house.

All the young *taupou* of chiefs and high talking chiefs are trained to make 'ava. Their entire life interest is focused upon the routine procedure. The learning of all the movements for preparing the 'ava is the responsibility of the chief (or wife). The mastering of this task indicates that the young daughter is ready to perform the 'ava when she is called upon to do it. Mastering of the 'ava practice and having professional etiquette may inspire an untitled men to marry a *taupou* of a *matai*.

The entire preparation of the 'ava ceremony reveals the spirit of Fa'a-Samoa. Every part of the ceremony is treated as sacred. Even in the announcing of drinks, the talking chief must know the proper address for the chief's cup. For example, in the village of Olosega, the proper addressing of high chief Tuiolosega's cup is *Aumaia matua i nuu lelei* (Bring the cup of good tidings).<sup>5</sup> Usually, at this part of the ceremony the most

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<sup>5</sup> In the Manu'a islands, only the Tuimanu'a had a cup and therefore for him alone could the talking chief call out, *Aumaia lau* 'ava (bring me the cup); however, in Tutuila islands most chiefs, some talking chiefs and some *taupou* have names for their 'ava cups. These are often whole phrases which the

important drinks are the first and the last. In most occasions, the high chief of the visiting village receives the first drink whereas the high chief of the hosting village drinks last. This is to show profound respect for allowing the visiting chief to receive the first drink which is the right of the host village high chief. The high chief of the hosting village will offer the opposite side of the *fale* (a designated position for prominent chiefs) for the visiting high chief to sit. The high chiefs and smaller chiefs will find their *pou* (posts) around the *fale*. The 'ava will not begin until the sitting is done and welcoming words are offered.

Significant sitting arrangements in a Samoa *fale* are important. Every family *matai* has a place, some without posts, in the *fale*. The sitting arrangement must be a correspondence between the members of the group and their positions in the *fale*. The social relationship is embodied forth in a seating plan with a definite symbolic value and the seating plan is always envisioned as a circle in which each segment has a social-political value.

Historically, Manu'a people have claimed to be the very first occasion for the 'ava ceremony in Samoa. This is based on their myth on the *Tauavaga a Pava ma le*

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talking chief calls out ending with the phrase, *aumaia le ipu a le sili* (bring me one famous-in-council the cup of...). The cup bearer who is to distribute the 'ava places his left hand, palm out, flat against the small of his back, and leans over the bowl, hold the cup in the hollow of his right hand. The *taupou* lifts the strainer, soaked with the dull, brownish liquid, in both hands, squeezes a little into the cup (usually a quarter of a cup full); if it is a great chief's cup, the cup bearer will lift it high above his head, circle the house, and sweep the cup down with a great curving gesture. The cup of a talking chief is handed to him with a simpler gesture from the wrist. Sometimes the ceremony is varied by passing the cup to several who are bound to refuse it. Strangers indicated their position by clapping their hands. After presenting the cup the cup bearer stands still, his left hand still against his back; his right hand lax and open, slightly extended, waiting to receive back the cup. The man drinking takes the cup in his left hand if his right hand post is occupied, his right if there is a near neighbor only on his left, and in both hands if he has near neighbors on each side. Lifting a corner of the mat, if the floor is entirely covered, he pours a small portion of the 'ava upon the pebbly floor saying, usually, *ia manuia* (be blessed) or *lau 'ava lea le atua* (this is your 'ava oh god). Occasionally, he adds other phrases of prayer or blessing especially with reference to the particular occasion; then raising the cup to his lips, takes a sip of the 'ava and handing the cup back to the cup bearer.

*tagata o le aiga o Sa Tagaloa*.<sup>6</sup> The purity and sacredness of this ceremony still exists today. When the 'ava is performed no one is allowed to speak except for the persons chanting the 'ava and the one passing the drinks to the chiefs. No one is allowed to get up and leave the ceremony at this time. Also everyone present will maintain a humble stance and keep quiet until the ceremony is done. Until the *tufa* 'ava (one who passes the drink to the chiefs) announces the ceremony is nearing the end and that the last cup is served, everyone will remain in reverence and stay idle.

The 'ava ceremony is known as *saofaiga ma atua* (sitting among the gods), literally, a sacred covenant to gain the favor of the gods. This is apparent in the performance of the ritual and the sacredness of the physical motions and words. Certain steps must be followed when doing the 'ava. These sacred steps and the language used by the chiefs can only be understood by them and specially trained *matai* participating in the ceremony.

#### Talimalo ma le Foa'i – Spirituality of Hospitality and Reciprocal Relations

The most highly Samoan institutionalized reciprocity lies between the two *itu*,

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<sup>6</sup> According to this myth, Pava was a divine man. He and his wife went to work as usual in the plantation, and left their children in the house. The children kindled a fire to cook some food. Tagaloa, seeing the smoke, came down from the heavens. He found the children, and asked where their parents were. "Gone to work," they said. "Go and tell your father that I am here," said Tagaloa. The children ran off and told the father. Pava thought it was Tagaloa who came to test his divine skills. So he broke off a taro leaf, wrapped himself in it, and floating down the river next to his house. Tagaloa waited for Pava, he wanted to shower so he walked to the river, saw the taro leaf floating. As he was about to grasp the leaf to eat, Pava jumped out of the taro leaf in excitement, *A ua ou iloa nei o oe o le tagata leaga, semanu a e faopuuina a'u* (Now I know that you are not a compassionate person, you almost ate me to death). Tagaloa was upset and asked Pava to prepare a meal for them. Pava then prepared a bowl of 'ava for Tagaloa. Pava's little son is creeping about the pebble floor upset the 'ava. Tagaloa flew in rage, and beat the child to death. Pava was upset and did not drink his 'ava. Tagaloa felt mercy for Pava, he then poured part of his 'ava on the boy's dead body and, therefore, he came back to life. This is the beginning of the Samoan ritual of the 'ava, before a chief drinks his cup, he pours a libation to the god for having mercy on him and his family in general. It is also the beginning of the *sa o le 'ava* (prohibition of the 'ava); when the ceremony is in the process no one is allowed to stand or talk during the ceremony until completed.

technically known as *faletama*.<sup>7</sup> Their functions as givers of *toga* and givers of *oloa* are clearly defined.<sup>8</sup> Always definitely conceived of as two sides, they form not one but two or more circles, each *itu* being housed in a separate house. The ceremonial prerogatives fall to the head of each descent group. Those relatives who preside over the distribution of food and cloth, and a *tulafale* or some male who acts as a *tulafale*, should no one in the group hold a *tulafale* title. The exchange takes place between houses and speeches are made outside, the contributions of each side are presented. The fine mats are carried to the place of presentation by women of the family who parade with them through the village. Although the ‘*ava* may be made, interest centers always upon the exchange, and especially upon the quality of each articles. Reciprocity centers on the presentation of gifts in return for services, and the conventionalization of contract relationships in the consumption of a common meal, ceremoniously prepared and consumed.<sup>9</sup>

The man who wishes a *faga pusi* (eel trap) woven, a *ipu* ‘ava (coconut cup) carved, a *paopao* (canoe) built, a *fale* built, a son *tatau* (tattooed); or the woman who wishes the services of a midwife will prepare a *umu* (an oven of food) and take it to the professional. Employer and craftsman will then partake of the meal together, and if the *tufuga* (a builder) plans to have other *tufuga* share in his task, he will call them and the

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<sup>7</sup> *Itu* refers to the two descent groups which are a party to marriage, births and deaths. It is often referred to as *paolo* (literally “shade”) or opposite side on a social occasion. For example, at a wedding, the bride’s relatives from the point of view of the bridegrooms, or the bridegroom’s relatives from the point of view of the brides. *Faletama*, on the other hand, refers to different lineage of a family with same origin.

<sup>8</sup> *Toga* is a Samoan valuable artifact, a fine mat worth about \$500.00 U.S. dollars (depending on the size displayed). *Oloa* refers to the material wealth (e.g. pigs, chickens, taros, bananas, case of corn beef, etc.) donated by both parties to any family occasion.

<sup>9</sup> The most recent event of this reciprocal exchange was at the funeral of Ronnie Lutu on 7 Aug. 2006. Both sides of the late Ronnie’s family came together, headed by the *tulafale* of each side, exchange gifts to present to the ministers and all the guests who were present to celebrate the life of Ronnie. The author was one of the speakers who took part in the funeral service with several Samoan *fai’feau*.

young men of his household who are serving as apprentices, to eat also. The acceptance of food and eating in common bind all of these to undertaking the task. For a simple undertaking, like weaving an eel trap which takes only a day, the purchaser will again prepare a *umu* and take it to the craftsman, who will invite him to eat from the gift basket.

The gift of food is also used to open formal relations between young people; a boy who wishes to *fa'amalamalama* (to pay his addresses) to a girl will carry a basket of food to her house. If her parents welcome him and she eats of this offering, this is clear expression of his suit. To the visiting *taupou* the entire *aumaga* must take gifts of food before any formal relations between visitors and guests can be established.

Of the slightly varied type are the feasts made by those engaged in any kind of work, the *umu* which is made before going fishing, the feast which the elderly woman makes for her female associates after she has burned the candlenuts for *tapa* dye. Here, although there are no two sides to a bargain, all participants are pledged through their common feast to a common activity.

In long undertakings like house building, when the carpenters are fed and sheltered by the household for months, the pledge is renewed at intervals during the work. 'Ava is drunk to Sao, the patron god of carpenters, or to Tagaloa, and a feast made, for the carpenters. Boat building and canoe building culminate in a final feast called the *umu sa* (sacred oven).<sup>10</sup> This feast is particularly made for the carpenters, the final payment for the work.

The Fa'a-Samoa lifeway is respect and honor for one another, a lifeway of

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<sup>10</sup> Now days, the concept *umu sa* is referred to the dedication service of a new church or hall or a meeting house of a village chief. This dedication may include reciprocal speeches, worship service, and concluded with a big feast for all who attended the ceremony.



referring to the unique culture found within the Samoan people. It encompasses the customs, traditions, and language that help to make up the Samoan culture. One of the major customary and esteemed attitudinal lifeway in Samoa is respect or *fa'aaloalo*.

### *Fa'aaloalo – The Dominant Samoan Attitude of Respect*

*Fa'aaloalo* is the heart of Samoan spirituality. It is a principle that governs every Samoan behavior in Fa'a-Samoa; a code of conduct that describes and dictates what you are supposed to do in terms of relationships with other people. *Fa'aaloalo* is showing respect to others, but respect alone does not define its profoundness. *Fa'aaloalo* is best described through examples of its practices.<sup>11</sup>

The heart of Samoan community is its social emphasis on *fa'aaloalo*. *Fa'aaloalo* is huge in Fa'a-Samoa because the culture is constructed upon its very essence. It begins in the *aiga* and expands into the inborn values and standards that Samoan's live by. All of Samoan interest, emotion, and energy are centered upon respectful relationships to fellows within an elaborate and respected social pattern. Individual work and leisure, religious activity, skill, and personal relationships receive great respect from the community.<sup>12</sup> If the individual attain a special aptitude in any of these aspects of Fa'a-Samoa, he is well recognized and respected by the community. Other things that are

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<sup>11</sup> One example is the practice of *tulou* (to bow when crossing someone seated, especially when talking or cross in front of elders). A true Samoan will never walked in front of a seated person or elder without lowering one's upper body and showing respect. It implies that the person walking makes a formal acknowledgement of the seated person's importance, expresses his or her difference and respect for the established order, and apologizes for any offence he or she might inadvertently give when walking or speaking before the seated or distinguished assembly.

<sup>12</sup> It must be noted that I disagreed with Margaret Mead who claimed that the Samoan community pays little (or not at all) attention to these dimensions of the Samoan lifeway. Mead, in her study of Samoa, claimed that these accounts "have never been admitted and receive limited attention from the [Samoan] society." See Margaret Mead, Social Organization of Manu'a, 80.

done within the pattern of importance deserve endless rituals of respect; for example, the young *matai*, the bride-to-be, and the expectant mother must never be alone. Anyone whose conduct is of importance to other people must be housed from isolation because no one would possibly wish to be alone unless they have an evil tendency.

### Norm of Respect in the Family

Respect (*fa'aaloalo*) is the foundation of good family relationships. Relationships bind every family and everything together. The protocols and etiquettes that define the *tu ma aga* (respectful behavior) are known by Samoans as *va fealoaloa'i* or *ava fatafata*. These protocols and etiquettes are needed to maintain good household relationships (relational arrangements). Respect is something that is learned in early childhood. It is learned through example but it is mostly taught through practice. Traditional Elder and High Chief Mamea comments, "Children are taught when they are young to respect their older siblings. At the same time their older siblings are being taught to respect their elders. There is always someone older than you to give respect to."<sup>13</sup> The young people are also respected by the adults of the Samoan community. Every child is treated as a son or daughter of the *matai* or village.

The structure of a Samoan *aiga* follows a hierarchy. The father is the patriarch of the *aiga* and next to him is the mother. From there it is the children from oldest to youngest. This structure becomes very important as the children learn *fa'aaloalo* because the siblings are very much involved with each other's learning. My friend Solomona says:

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<sup>13</sup> Discussion with author, 19 Jan. 2006.

*Pe a oo ina matua e fai feau, o le tagata la'ititi e fa'alogo i le tagata matua e aunoa ma le toe tali atu. Afai o loo malaga ese matua, o le alo matua na te tauaveina le matafaioi o matua. O ia lena e avea ma ta'ita'i o le aiga ma e tatau ona usita'i i ai tagata laiti. Ua iloa lelei lava afai e la'ititi le tagata e tatau ona fa'alogo i le ua matua atu. O le mea lena e ta'u o le fa'aaloalo. Afai e lamo'i le tagata aua le taumafai e momoli atu ou manatu i se talanoaga ua fai. O le fa'atonuga e sau mai le tagata matua.<sup>14</sup>*

When old enough to do chores, the youngest is supposed to listen to the older ones without talking back. If the parents are away, the oldest child will assume the responsibility of the parents. He or she will then be the presiding person of authority in the household at the time and all the young ones will listen to that person. It is understood that if you're younger than your brother then you listen to him, and if you're younger than your sister then you listen to her. That's *fa'aaloalo*. If you are younger you don't try to impose your views on discussions or decisions that are made. Instructions come from the older person.

If a child who is left in charge tells the younger siblings to do something counter to the teachings of the parents, the younger child, having no choice, will obey. This child who is left in charge will be held responsible when the parents return. By the same token, if a younger child refuses to follow the oldest child's instructions, both the oldest child and the parents will likely discipline the younger child for disobeying. The whole family including the extended family is involved in teaching *fa'aaloalo*. *Fa'aaloalo* in this case is building the foundation of the family.

Another example is the expected attitude at meal times. The father and mother eat first and then everyone else follows in their learned order of hierarchy. I recall being taught that there is a certain time when everyone eats. Being the youngest of the family, I have the privilege to eat last. When food is distributed during meals, always a portion is put aside for those who served. It is a custom of *fa'aaloalo* to set aside food for the servers. All Samoan families are involved in practicing *fa'aaloalo*, an unwritten code of

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<sup>14</sup> Discussion with author, 19 Jan. 2006.

law that is enforced and taught through its practice in the home. *Fa'aaloalo* brings order through respect. Samoan families are organized this way, and the society in turns carries on this order.

### Norm of Respect in the Village

Whatever is taught in the *aiga* is reinforced in the *nu'u*. Whatever has not been taught in the *aiga* will be taught in the *nu'u*. The *nu'u*, in essence, is an extension of the *aiga*. As each child knows his own tasks and responsibilities in the *aiga*, each *aiga* in the *nu'u* knows its position in the *nu'u* hierarchy. Whenever there is a *fa'alavelave* (village function such as wedding, funeral, bestowal of titles, etc.), the entire *nu'u* gathers like an *aiga* and awaits the instructions from the *matai*s of the village. There is a hierarchy or ranking of *matai* by age and authority just as there is a ranking of children in the *aiga*.

Mealtime at the *nu'u* function is the best example of everyone knowing the proper role in the *nu'u fa'aaloalo*. Solomona (now appointed with a new titular *matai* title of a high chief in Savai'i) claimed that his family presides and leads all *nu'u* activities because he is the high *matai* of his *nu'u*. When mealtime comes around, his family eats first. Following the *matai's* family would be the next ranked and his family.<sup>15</sup> It goes just as the order that siblings would follow in an *aiga*. Likewise, everyone knows his/her positions, benefits, and responsibilities.

On a lower level in the village, the same principle is followed. In a meeting of young men, the *matai's* son will preside. He will in this case act as a father would in the home or as his father, the *matai*, would in the village. The *matai's* son gives instructions and because of his position in the village hierarchy, he is respected and obeyed by all the

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<sup>15</sup> Discussion with author, 19 Jan. 2006.

other young men. High Talking Chief Malaepule commented:

*O le laiti o tamaiti ua tatau ona a'oa'o i auala ina ia iloa tonu ala e tatau. E i ai ala eseese e vaai ai i le tagata. E i ai fo'i ala eseese e tautala ai i tagata. Ae faia uma nei mea i le fa'aaloalo. Afai e avea le fa'aaloalo ma vaega atoa o le soifuaga o Samoa, aisea e le fa'atumauiina ai i fafo? O le ulua'i sitepu ma le la'asaga, o le fa'aaloalo le mea muamua e a'oa'o i fanau. Poo ifea lava e i ai se aganu'u, e maua ai fo'i le fa'aaloalo.<sup>16</sup>*

While children are young, they are taught that there are certain ways to do certain things. There are different ways to look at people. There are different ways to talk around people. Everything is done with *fa'aaloalo*. If *fa'aaloalo* is part of the whole Samoa way, then why does it remain in practice outside of Samoa? Because it is the building block of the culture, *fa'aaloalo* is the first thing taught to a young Samoan. Wherever the culture is found, *fa'aaloalo* is found too.

From this perspective, *fa'aaloalo* is taught and then practiced in the community as a whole. It starts, as Malaepule said, at a very young age and then it is practiced as the children grow up with it at home and out of the home. The village teaches *fa'aaloalo* as well.

Solomona stated that *fa'aaloalo* is more than respect. It is a way of living in a community with harmony. Without *fa'aaloalo* in Samoa there is chaos. Most of the problems in the communities are caused by someone showing a lack of respect for another. *Fa'aaloalo* is culture and it's what keeps the Samoans together.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Discussion with author, 23 Feb. 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Solomona shared a story of a young man named Tupou who is his cousin. One day, Tupou was on the *malae* (village green field) when an older man told him to leave the *malae* because there was a village function for the older men to be held there. Tupou talked back to the man and disobeyed his instructions. The older man then spanked him. Tupou arrived home and told his parents that a man had spanked him. When his parents heard the whole story, Tupou got spanked again for not showing respect to his elders. This is how *fa'aaloalo*, which is taught in the home, is reinforced in every Samoan village. It is expected of all no matter where they are from and regardless who their family is. If *fa'aaloalo* is not observed, then it is the responsibility of the village chiefs and elders to teach and enforce it.

The *ifoga* or demonstration of remorse for an offense by the family and/or village of the offender is probably the greatest paradigm of *fa'aaloalo* as it pertains to community and harmony. At the time when he worked as a policeman, Reverend Samuelu Mauga remembered an altercation between high schools boys from one village and boys from another village. He reported:

*I le tasi aoauli na maua mai le valaau i le ofisa e mana'omia se fesoasoani i le tasi o malae taalo i Tafuna. To'atasi se tamaititi ua maluu. O le tama na sasaina le tamaititi ua na ta sese lenei tamaititi i le pate pesipolo e sau mai se tasi o nu'u. O le tama na taina le pate ona o lona tau atu i nisi o tamaiti na ula ia te ia. O le tama na maluu e sau mai le isi nu'u, ese mai i le na na sasaina le pate. O lenei fa'alavelave na matua ootia ai loto ma fa'anoanoaga o nei nu'u ae le taulia ai le atunu'u atoa. Aua o mea fa'apenei e le tutupu i Samoa.<sup>18</sup>*

One afternoon while on duty, I received a call from the office requesting assistance at one of the parks in Tafuna. One of the students had been killed. The student had been mistaken for another young man who had been involved in a conflict between boys of two different villages and he was hit in the back of the head with a baseball bat. The boy swinging the bat was acting in retaliation to the other boys picking on him the day before. The student that was killed was from a different village than that of the kid swinging the bat. The tragedy spread sadness throughout the villages of both the victim and the perpetrator not to mention the entire Samoan community. Things like this just don't happen in Samoa.

In a situation like this it would be easy for riots between villages to start. Fortunately, *fa'aaloalo* comes into play in these situations and keeps the people together. In this particular situation the family of the offender practiced *fa'aaloalo* through *ifoga* (act of reconciliation) and their entire village participated. The purpose of this *ifoga* was for one village to literally beg for the forgiveness of the other village. This was done by the whole village going into the village of the victim and bowing on hands and knees with *ie*

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<sup>18</sup> Discussion with author, 22 Aug. 2004.

*toga* over their heads in front of the victim's home. There they remained in silence until they were forgiven (this is customary to wait, no matter how long it takes). When forgiven, the village gave their *ie toga* to the victim's family and left the victim's village in peace.

In the case of the two high school students, the family did their *ifoga* in the rain and mud and remained there until the victim's family and their village *matai* decided that the perpetrator's family and village had show the height of their remorse and respect thus demonstrating *fa'aaloalo* at its best. It must be noted here that the perpetrator of the crime was duly tried in a court of law and sentenced to a prison term. Nonetheless, the *ifoga* was performed and village riots and retaliation were prevented. It is good to know that the *ifoga* can be practiced on a family and village level to prevent unnecessary bloodshed.

#### Norm of Respect in the District

Districts in Samoa are determined by area and number of villages under jurisdiction of paramount chiefs. On the district level, *fa'aaloalo* is most frequently observed in land disputes, inter-village conflicts, and *fa'alavelave*, such as the death of a paramount chief. As in the family, rank and authority play a very important role at this age. A group of talking chiefs reported in one of our discussions:

*Afai e tupu se fa'aletonu i le va o  
ni tagata se to'alua ona o se  
fanua ma tupu ai se fa'afitauli,  
ona talanoa lea o tamalii o nu'u  
ia e lua ina ia foia lea fa'aletonu.  
Afai e le mafai e tamalii o nu'u  
ona fai se fa'aiuga lelei, ona ave  
lea i alii o le itumalo e latou te*

If men from two neighboring villages within the same district lay claim to the same piece of land and a dispute ensues, the chiefs of the two villages will meet and try to resolve the matter first. If the village chiefs cannot agree, the case goes to the district chiefs, which

*faia se fa'aiuga lelei. Afai e uma le fa'aiuga a alii o le itumalo, ua maua fo'i le tali o lea fa'afitauli.*

*Afai o se fa'afitauli e tupu i le va o ni nu'u se lua, e mafai e matai ona taofia lea fa'alavelave. O le alii sili o ia nuu e mafai ona saunoa mo le filemu ma valaau se talanoaga a matai o ia nu'u. O tagata o nei nu'u e fa'atalitali mo se tali. Afai e le mafai e matai o ia nu'u ona faia se iuga lelei, ona ave lea i le itumalo mo se fa'aiuga.*

*Afai e tu'umalo se alii sili o se nu'u e auai uma nu'u o lea itumalo i le tausiga ma gasologa o le maliu e aofia ai ma leo (o lenei aganu'u pe a ma le umi i le tolu aso e omai ai aumaga a nu'u tuaoi e leoleo, fai toniga, pepese i le aiga o le alii ua maliu atoa ai ma latou mealofa o fugalaau, ie toga, ma nisi o laei mo le maliu). O auala o le itumalo e tu'i launiu ma fugalaau; e leai se tagata e toe savali i le ala tele, e ui uma i le alatua poo le matafaga, e tele fo'i le ta'umafataga e saunia e le nu'u ma le itumalo mo tagata e auai i le maliu ma fesoasoani i le aiga e ala i le foa'i o toga, pua'a, ma le tele lava o nisi mea...<sup>19</sup>*

rarely happened in the past. Once the district chiefs make a decision, the matter is settled.

If two different villages get involved in an argument or conflict, the village chiefs can put a stop to it. The high chief from either village can declare a peace and call a meeting of all the chiefs of the two villages. The villagers will await their decision. If the village chiefs cannot resolve the conflict, they will go to the district council of chiefs for a final decision.

If the chief of any village dies the entire district becomes involved in the elaborate funeral proceedings including the traditional *leo* (a wake which can last up to three days in which a group from every village will come dressed in uniform and sing to the family of the deceased and present gifts of flowers, *ie toga*, and burial garments). The district roads are adorned with coconut leaves and flowers; no one is allowed to walk the road during the funeral procession that covers the entire distance of the district, and great amounts of food are prepared by the village for all those who support the family on the day of the funeral by bringing *toga* and pigs...

In a *fa'alavelave* everybody seems to know exactly what to do, when to do it and how it is to be done. Yet, seldom does one hear instructions being given. When one attends a funeral in Samoa for a high chief of a village, he will be amazed at how things were done

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<sup>19</sup> Poumafua Misipati Taliva'a and Taumaga Meafou Muagututia, discussion with author, 10 Mar. 2004.



with such order and efficiency despite the fact that the chief who usually keeps things under control was no longer there to preside. One will wonder how people knew what to do without receiving instructions. Then one will realize that the chief doesn't always give the instructions. The Samoans grow up being taught and practicing their roles and the importance of their position in the *aiga*, *nu'u*, and *itumalo*.

Some of the common everyday Fa'a-Samoa expressions of *fa'aaloalo* are expected that had not yet been mentioned. These are not exclusive to the *aiga*, *nu'u*, or district. They are:

1. Taking off shoes when entering a home of a host. This shows *fa'aaloalo* because it is treating a person's home like holy ground that can't be walked on with shoes (e.g. Moses and the burning bush).
2. Sitting down when eating. If a Samoan is seen walking and eating food at the same time, she or he is labeled as disrespectful and impolite. You may hear other Samoans say, *le a'oa'ia* which means "you have not been trained well."
3. Taking a gift as a *fa'aoso*<sup>20</sup> when visiting a family. One should never go empty handed when invited to someone's home. In return, the hosting family gives the guest the best of what they have.
4. Helping elderly people. Giving up your seat for an elder or stopping to assist an elderly person with a heavy load or chore is not uncommon in Samoa.
5. Lowering one's body to less elevation when addressing a person of higher authority or position. If the person being addressed is standing, you sit. If the

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<sup>20</sup> Food or material things prepared by the hosting family for the people who had come to support them on their *fa'alavelave*. Today, usually a *fa'aoso* (material gifts) would include cases of corn-beef, keg of beef, case of chicken, cases of tuna and a variety of food.

person is sitting, you stoop or kneel. If the person is kneeling, you sit on the floor.

6. Not raising your voice after dark. Once the sun sets at night in Samoa, each person is expected to be in his/her home with family. Anyone who is not inside must show respect for the family by their peaceful silence.

As a general idea, I have heard *fa'aaloalo* discussed often and have given it my own definition. *Fa'aaloalo* is a governing dominant attitude or behavior that determines one's Samoan identity. To know Fa'a-Samoa and the spirituality that underlies it, one must understand *fa'aaloalo* because it is Fa'a-Samoa in a sense that the culture revolves around *fa'aaloalo*. *Fa'aaloalo* has much to do with respect and to do with how we live in our Samoan communities. It is the Samoan worldview. Samoans look at everything through the eyes of *fa'aaloalo*: how activities are arranged, how we speak to one another, and even the way we group our people as to who says what comes through this world view of respect. When we look at each other and when we interact with one another we look for that and if we don't see it, it automatically affects how we interpret what is going on and it affects how we feel towards the other person.

High Chief Mano'o Auimatagi shared his experience of the Samoan families in New Zealand. He stated that *fa'aaloalo* is an esteemed type of Samoan values that keeps children disciplined and polite. It is crucial because Samoans believe that what the child do reflects what the parents teach in the home. If a child does something disrespectful, then his or her parents are to blame, and the family name is shamed.<sup>21</sup> His statement implies that Samoans uphold a high standard of honor in the family. *Fa'aaloalo* is an

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<sup>21</sup> Speech at the Samoan Pastor Retreat, 20 April 2006, Las Vegas, Nevada.

important part of keeping this honor. It is a principle that governs every Samoan behavior in the Fa'a-Samoa. It may be compared to a code of conduct that dictates what you are supposed to do in terms of relationships with other people. It is best described through examples of its practice.

In a discussion with the Reverend Andy Leavasa, he offered this comment: “The Samoan value of *fa'aaloalo* is less practiced by the Samoans here. A sense of respect and honor for the elders is lacking in our community. Lacking this important value is the root of many spiritual problems and abuses in our community and families.”<sup>22</sup> I believe this lack creates a generational gap and ignites many conflicting interests between young Samoans and adults, a problem that exists both in the Samoan community and in the church. Therefore, Samoans need to develop an ethos of leadership that will avoid this lack of respect.

While Fa'a-Samoa is inspiringly fashioned around respect and reputation, other aspects of the Samoan lifeway are also important to the discussion. Samoa also has specific principles which undergird respect for all that are considered forbidden.

#### Kinship Functions – *Vafealoaloa'i ma Faia*

The information on kinship in the islands of Manu'a is based upon a rather personal elaboration of the genealogical method. The Samoan structure of relationship terms is so loose that endless indirect phrases are resorted to whenever it is necessary to actually define a relationship such as *o le tuafafine o le tama o lo'u tina* (the sister of the father of my mother) or *o le uso o le to'alua o lo'u afafine* (the brother of the husband of

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<sup>22</sup> Discussion with author, 23 March 2006.

my daughter).

Moreover, none of the actual relationship terms are ever used as terms of address. Only on rare occasions that relationship is called into service to carefully describe either verbally or mentally a given relationship. Every Samoan adult is conscious of the differences between direct and collateral descent, between age and generation, between blood relationships and relationships by marriage. In attempting to use an original genealogical method, the custom of searching brings into play this awareness of fine distinctions not clear in the customary terminology. The results are similar to the list given by Rivers<sup>23</sup> after allowance has been made for a number of errors in the list he collected during his very brief stay in Samoa.

In such an inquiry as that of Rivers the term *uso* (sister or brother) is restricted to a sibling of the same sex, extended to first cousins of the same sex. More generally the reply to a question about one, Maofa, designated in a genealogy as a woman's mother's brother's child and called *uso* in every day life would be that Maofa was the *afafine* (daughter of woman speaking) *o le tuagane* (brother of woman speaking) *o lo'u tina* (mother), "the daughter of the brother of my mother." This method of investigation produces a very scarce list of terms with restricted uses and leaves the impression that description phrases must necessarily be resorted to in all more distant relationships.

### Kin Reliance vs. Self-Reliance

Perhaps one of the clearest and most common examples of conflict Samoans encounter when they try to adapt to life in the United States is when an individual or

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<sup>23</sup> W. H. R. Rivers, The History of Melanesian Society, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 400. See also National Science Foundation as a part of the National STEM Digital Library, as program of Pacific Resources for Education and Learning [online]; [www.nsdsl.org](http://www.nsdsl.org).

family attempts to step outside the communal circle of interdependence and claim their individual right to become self-reliant.

In American culture, which values self-reliance, children are encouraged to “leave the nest”<sup>24</sup> and establish their own households independent of their parents. Parents, particularly mothers, are encouraged to “let go” of their children, rather than continue to protect them into adulthood. Children who remain dependent on their parents into adulthood are often criticized.

This value system is direct opposition to the Samoan culture, which emphasizes family reliance and communal strategies for the whole family’s survival. Children often live in their parents’ home, even after getting married and having children. Samoan family reliance has many advantages:

1. Communal strategies ensure that the beliefs and customs of Fa’a-Samoa are maintained from generation to generation.
2. Ensures that the needs of children, the elderly, and the sick and less-capable family members are met.
3. Pools and/or redistributes resources for the well-being of the entire group.
4. Allows for long-term investments for the group, including higher education for talented family members.
5. Enables family members who are temporarily in need of funds for life-transition events like births, weddings, and funerals costs to afford and achieve stability.

Today, the Samoans still believe in family reliance. It is what makes Samoan families

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<sup>24</sup> In the sense of “self-govern” or “to be on your own” without parental or family support. In the American culture, children are encouraged to be self-supporting and be on their own at the age of eighteen. This is contrary to the Samoan culture which highly encourages community-bonding and not individualism. In Samoan culture, children are encouraged to stay home as long as they want to stay with their parents.

strong and healthy. This is apparent when Samoans have *fa'alavelave* (important occasions), regardless of where they may be geographically, the entire family comes to where a *fa'alavelave* is held to give their support—financially or economically—for the family or village.

At the 2006 Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa Conference, the Samoan elders revealed the complicated struggle of the Samoans and their continuous effort to maintain Fa'a-Samoa. Others have concluded that the absence of village control is the source of this struggle. Some have said that it is the conflict between Fa'a-Samoa and American culture. Still others have claimed that it is the tensions between *matai* and church over the question of power.<sup>25</sup> While these observations are relevant to the identification of the spiritual problems in the Samoan community, there is a much deeper need to understand the important factors of Fa'a-Samoa contradicting with the American values.

### Vafealoa'i – Attitudes Towards Women

Samoans are curiously free from the widespread American attitude towards *tama'ita'i* (women). *Tama'ita'i*<sup>26</sup> are the most respected individuals in any Samoan *aiga* or community. Some Western historians generally miscalculate the fact that *tama'ita'i* are significant in the Samoan social order. Whether a *tama'ita'i* has a title or not, she is well respected. Again, I strongly disagreed with Mead who claimed that “Neither men

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<sup>25</sup> Discussion with Samoan *faiifeau*, 19 March 2006. Important theological and social issues related to the development of the Samoan community and spirituality were the major topics discussed at the conference.

<sup>26</sup> It must be noted that the word *tamaita'i* is a reverent address for all Samoan women. Yet it is especially used for the unmarried women in their adolescent years. The wives of the chiefs are called *faletua* (for high chiefs) and *tausi* (for talking chiefs), they can also be addressed as *tamaita'i*.

nor women are of importance unless they hold titles.”<sup>27</sup> In Samoa, those who do not hold titles are not included in ceremonial occasions. However, they are respected members of the community regardless of whether they have titles or not. Those with titles and those without titles are all part of the bulk of the community labor for success. The young girl has been institutionalized as *taupou* and thus may make the ‘ava in the council house of chiefs, or drink the first cup of ‘ava on a *malaga*.<sup>28</sup> She receives higher honors than those accorded to a *manaia*. Women may also hold titles, for example, Makelita, the last Tuimanu’a but one was a woman, and Talala, mother of Tufele, who held the *matai* name of Leota in Upolu.

The *feagaiga* (covenant) or *tama sa* (sacred child) is a social position of high honor held by a sister or the descendant of a female *faletama* (kinship). It is a covenant in the sense that there is an implicit agreement as to the roles and status that each party (the brother and his descendants as one party, and her sister and her descendants as the other party) observes. Today, this position has now been extended to the church *faiifeau* (minister) and will remain with them as long as the covenant continues. Because of this shift, *tamaita’i* are no longer considered as important in the Samoan society in the United States as they are in Samoa.

*Tama’ita’i* are linked more closely to routine domestic tasks. The *tama* (boys) are responsible for the heavy labor of taro and banana plantation, fishing, hunting, and

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<sup>27</sup> Mead, *Social Organization of Manu’a*, 123.

<sup>28</sup> Hosting a *malaga* is very important in the Fa’a-Samoa. It is here where the esteem hospitality and kindness of Samoa is observed. Ceremonial visit paid according to Samoan custom. Days of preparation varies for a *malaga*, depending on the visiting village, the total count of chiefs involved, and the distribution of the visiting party to village families for hosting. A *malaga* fall into four categories: the *lauga* (traditional speech), the *aiava* (food gift for the visiting village), the ‘ava ceremony, and the *ta’alolo* (feast).

village work which requires masculine muscles. They faced tattooing, a painful tiresome proceeding, additionally stressed by group ceremony and taboo. The *tama'ita'i* entrance into the *aualuma* was always, not just occasionally, marked by a great feast. The unmarried girls and the widows slept, at least part of the time, in the house of the *taupou*. It is here where they learn the multi-responsibilities of women in the family and village, and learned special skills of weaving, cooking, fishing, and planting. From here they enter the society of older women. This group is supervised by an older woman or a wife of a chief. The women in Samoa have their own *nu'u—o le nu'u o faletua ma tausi* (village organization of women).

Women are important in the Samoan community, though they are not able to sit in the village *fono*. But they do have their own meetings to discuss women's issues and other village tasks. They impose punishments for women who violate or have been reported to break any life principle that goes against the village or the women's organization.<sup>29</sup>

#### Functions of Relatives Connected with Birth: *Fanauga*

The birth—*fanau* or *ola*—of a woman's first child was considered as much more important than any subsequent birth. Ceremonies did not vary in respect to sex: a girl's birth was celebrated with the same ceremony as a boy's. This may be due to the fact that the *alaalafaga* (birth feast) is regarded as the mother's feast, rather than as the child's feast. A greater emphasis upon a first birth is one of the few Samoan remnants of the prestige of the first born. If the mother is of high rank, especially if she has been a

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<sup>29</sup> It must be noted that although women are important figures in Samoa and are well-respected within their prospective organizations, their status has changed due to individualism here in America.



*taupou*, she is expected to return to her own village for the birth of a first child. The *toga oloa* (gift-giving reciprocity) set up at marriage, continues for the birth of each child, but the largest exchange takes place for the first born. As soon as a woman's pregnancy is known, her husband's relatives bring her presents of food. This official recognition of her condition is followed by a very substantial gift *si'isi'i tama* when she sets out for her own village. In addition to the property exchanged at the birth feast itself, the mother takes a gift of *toga* (*fa'aulufale* – the preface of the child to his father's home) back to her husband's family if she is returning to his home.<sup>30</sup>

The mother's female relatives care for her, and the father's relatives care for the child. No one whom the mother calls *tuagane* (male sibling of a woman) can be present, nor can the father be present if any woman whom he calls *tuafafine* (female sibling of a man) is assisting. Different relatives may give the child names but the official name is the name bestowed by a member of the father's paternal line.

### Samoa Customs and Spirituality of Architecture and Navigation

Long ago, Samoa had its own way of dealing with the realities of life. They were habituated and accustomed to their own methods of treatment for sickness, house and boat building, sailing through the rough seas, and looking at the stars for direction and forecasting weather. Samoans rely greatly on their knowledge and experience with their

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<sup>30</sup> Faumatala Niuatoa Lo'a, discussion with author, 13 Jan. 2004. Mrs. Lo'a revealed that *fa'aulufale* originates from a Samoan primitive custom of polygamy. In ancient times the Samoans indulged in plurality of wives. Some chiefs had as many as seven, ten or more wives. The wives did not live in the same household. Each one lodged with, and was taken care of by, a different family. If one of the wives became pregnant, his people would convey her to her own family for her confinement. The child is born and gains some strength. The mother's immediate family and her fellow townsmen will then prepare some fine mats and other gifts to be sent with mother of the child to the chief. This is known as *fa'aulufale* or *fa'aulufalega* (house dedication).

surrounding to determine the course of their daily endeavors. In other words, Samoa was profoundly connected and associated with the culture of creation.

One tradition in the village of Fitiuta was called *pupu* (holes). I was informed by Lae and his wife Vaialofi that the *pupu* is like a *fa'ailo* (fortune teller), located in the woods closer to the shore. When this *pupu* spits out sea water, the tide is unfit for fishing. If it lets out a chanting sound, the weather is suitable for fishing and sailing. If the *pupu* makes a loud noise at night or day, it means a great storm is heading their way. According to Lae and his wife, this tradition has been helpful to the village in the old days, even today. Sometimes they receive no news at all from the main island of Tutuila about the weather forecast. If they suspected that a storm is heading their way, they would turn to the *pupu* for assertion.<sup>31</sup>

Another tradition was told by Fa'avela and Simalua. According to them, Samoa used to have traditions to interpret the lament of animals or birds. Long ago, if a *manualii* (chief's bird who inhabits in the deep forest) cries from the mountain and heads toward the sea, it predicts the arrival of a family member or a visitor. If it cries from the sea and heads toward the mountain, it means there will be a death in the family. If a cat cries and circles around the house at night it also means a relative close by or faraway had died. If a bird flies around in circles inside a house, this foreshadows something unpleasant is going to happen; family endeavors must proceed with caution.<sup>32</sup>

We can see from these accounts that Samoans were fondly accustomed to the culture of nature (supernatural occurrences such as winds, rough seas, etc.). Their

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<sup>31</sup> Discussion with author, 11 Feb. 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Discussion with author, 23 Feb. 2004.

spirituality originates from their experiences with nature. Nature has given them the inspiration that can only come from ecological sources. This is where Fa'a-Samoa meets spirituality, through their epistemology of nature. Fa'a-Samoa traditions of this sort, oral or written, have carried thoughts from one Samoan generation to another. If Fa'a-Samoa was not created, there would be no Samoan experience and no set of norms for the Samoan community as well. Samoans who understand that they are tradition keepers know that there is a relationship between their conduct and nature. If Fa'a-Samoa were not created nobody would ever have known Samoan spirituality.

There is a close relationship between Fa'a-Samoa and creation. There is a rich web of relationships between the two. Fa'a-Samoa has always been integral to nature. Sacred traditions, bird chants, cat cries, sacred dances, boat builders, and herbal remedies, have been employed in places of worship and as aids to prayer and meditation in Fa'a-Samoa. Judging by this alone, Fa'a-Samoa seems to be a natural vehicle for expressing or connecting with the transcendent through Samoan spirituality.

The Samoan relationship with their gods was evident through their total dependence on the family deities for strength and guidance. Historians noted that Samoan chiefs accepted that Jehovah and their god Tagaloa had many similarities.<sup>33</sup> Indeed the Samoans already believed in a higher being, so that the concept of an "all seeing, all knowing" God, was already an accepted part of their ideology.<sup>34</sup> Now they

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<sup>33</sup> Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1987), 14. Meleisea quotes (Freeman, "Samoa Papers") similarities include "all searching eyes" and "ability to see in the dark," and "swift to know and to require the evil...done among men."

<sup>34</sup> Information acquired from microfilm copies at the Feleti Barstow Library, Utulei, American Samoa, 2004. Also the personal papers of the late Derek Freeman, including correspondence from 1938 to the time of his death, field notes, and documents concerned chiefly with Samoa and the so-called Mead-

were told that they must know and love, but most importantly, must understand this new God.

### *Tufuga Samoa – Spirituality of Architecture*

The inspiring architectural cultural heritage of Samoa is very special in its way of showing the culture and traditions of its inhabitants and of the Fa'a-Samoa way of living. The wooden skeleton structures of the buildings are unique and provide a very good adaptation to the climatic conditions of Samoa. *Tufuga* heritage is part of the Samoan identity. Valid principles of architecture can generally be derived from the complex frame construction up to high-complicated suspended constructions, which contribute to an extended understanding of the architectural development and the interrelations between Samoan *fale* (house) and community.

The building customs of Samoa can be traced way back to Tagaloamatua who built a *fale* Samoa for his two sons. Since this construction by Tagaloamatua, Samoans had progressively developed the skills and knowledge of the building trade. The most prevalent manifestation of traditional and practical Samoan architecture is the *fale*. A *fale* is a traditional Samoan home or meeting house, but the word is also used to denote a custom; for example, *o le fale lalaga* (a weaving house), *fale va'a* (boat house), or *fale fofo ma'i* (a medicine house).

The Samoan *fale* generally follows a typical architectural structure which is embedded in the minds of the traditional builders who are distinctively recognized throughout Samoa. These traditional builders are known by their distinguished titles and

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Freeman controversy, but also covering other aspects of his career, have been deposited in the MSS 522, Mandeville Special Collections Library at the University of California, San Diego. The acquisition of this collection began in 2000, a year before Derek Freeman's death, and was largely completed in 2002.

status identified distinctively with paramount and royal chiefs.<sup>35</sup> According to Sunia, these traditional builders are also known as family-builders in a district basis: the *Aiga Salemalama* are the builders in Tutuila; the *Aiga Sa-Leifi* are the builders of Upolu, while the *Sao ma lona aiga* are the family of builders from Manu'a.<sup>36</sup> All of these family builders are endowed with the ability to build almost identical structures and features of the two major culturally embedded *fale* called *faletele* and *faleafolau*.<sup>37</sup>

The *matai tufuga* or *agaiotupu* (master builder) is one who has successfully completed a house and received the series of payments which culminate in the *umu sa* (sacred oven) which is the final payment. The *umu* is a formal feast in honor of the chief carpenter of a house building or a canoe building, and to it are invited all of the master craftsmen of the village. Their participation in this ceremony is their promise to the village that they accept the new carpenter as one of themselves. These master carpenters prescribe in detail the procedure of house building upon which hinges the ceremonial payments.

According to High Talking Faimalo, the exact way in which the services of a *tufuga* are retained are: what payment is made upon this occasion, the number of '*ava*

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<sup>35</sup> Leulusoo Poao Uili Leatutufu, *Fa'avāe o Samoa* (Constitution of Samoa) (San Francisco: n.p. 1977), 158. For example, the Tuimanua's traditional *tufuga* (builders) are known as Saoluaga. The Malietoa's *tufuga* are known as Selefuti; Tuiaana's *tufuga* are known as Moe; Tuiatua's *tufuga* are known as Leifi; Mauga's *tufuga* are known as Aetonu; and Le'iato's *tufuga* are known as Tuinei.

<sup>36</sup> Fofu I. F. Sunia, *Lupe o le Foaga*, (Doves of the Nest) vol. 2 (Pago Pago: Department of Education, 1997), 253.

<sup>37</sup> *Faletele* is the guest house of high ranking village chiefs; also known as *maota o le alii*. *Faletele* has three large pillars elevated as center posts connected to the '*au'au* (center ridge) on the house top. The '*aso* (thatched rafters) encircling the entire roof are all connected to the '*au'au* as well. Samoan Christianity introduced a theological significance of the three pillars as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The '*au'au* or the center ridge represents God. The '*aso* represents the people of the world coming together in faith by connecting to the '*au'au* (God). *Fale afolau* is the sleeping house (*fale malolo*) of high ranking talking chiefs, traditionally known as *laoa o le tulafale* (the house of the talking chief).

ceremonies which accompany the erection of house or canoe, the number of feasts, and the number of payments of *fala* (mats) and *ie toga*. These are all matters in the hands of the master carpenters.<sup>38</sup> If the chief whose house is built does not have enough resources to finish his house, he must live in the house, one side of which is simply thatched up perpendicularly rather than being rounded out until he accumulates sufficient property to complete his house. There also is the ruling that a man who engages new carpenters after a disagreement with the original one, must make all payments over again from the beginning. But all these rulings are enforced upon young and erratic carpenters or stingy employers by the *fono* of the village acting as a whole, not by any organization of the carpenters themselves.

No other relationship between the employer and employee is so much in the public interest. A man who wishes a *faga pusi* (eel trap) woven or an *ipu popo* (coconut cup) carved will take a present of cooked food to the man whose services he desires. If the work requires only a few hours, another basket of cooked food which the employer eats with the craftsmen completes the transaction. Payment is always immediate and partly in advance and the affair is too uncomplicated to involve the village in any way. In similar fashion, *fa'atosaga* (midwives), *taulaitu*, those skilled at *tipi* (circumcision), and those in possession of *vai aitu*, are engaged with a present and rewarded with a present privately bestowed.

Smaller arts like *upega* (netting), *lagaga o mailei* (weaving of traps), *fausiga o pa fagota* (making of fish hooks), *ipu inu* (carving of coconut shells and 'ava cups), are taught by the old men of the household to the younger ones. Most boys acquire the

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<sup>38</sup> Discussion with author, 25 March 2004.

rudiments of the techniques while few gain the reputation of experts and are sought as instructors by their young relatives. A fisherman usually knows thoroughly the techniques connected with his craft such as cord making, trap making, netting, and hook making.

Transitioning from the apprentice status to the status of full-fledged craftsman is also accomplished through the good offices of relatives who at first give the boy small contracts to build *tunoa* (cook-houses) and *fale mamao* (outhouses), and finally his first real opportunity for a large house, the successful completion of which will take him out of the ranks of the apprentices and mark him as a master. Any problems in the career of a hopeful carpenter, as when he undertakes a task beyond his power, are supervised by the watchful teacher. His teacher will help him finish his task.

#### *Aga o Femalagaiga – Spirituality of Navigation*

Samoans were islanders, and the sea was an integral part of everyone's lives and history. In fact, maritime knowledge was a point of intersection of several different branches of Samoan knowledge: of the sea, coast, and reef; of plants and marine life; of weather; of the movements of heavenly bodies; of the movement of things through sea and sky; of the organization/conceptualization of space and geography; and of food technology. To fully come to terms with all of this is beyond the reach of this study, though it should be clear from the outset that the view in which this smaller story takes place is vast, like the ocean that joins Samoa to the rest of the world.

Samoa regarded the sea not so much as a barrier, but as a connection to other places. This point, made most recently and strongly by Epeli Hau'ofa, has long been

observed by islanders and a few scholars.<sup>39</sup> One of the Samoan words for the ocean, *vasa*, draws from the root words of *va*, which names the space or relationship, and *sa*, sacred—the dynamic tension—the sacred between places, objects and people. This was affectionate for the Samoan approach to the ocean; as an archipelago the sea was what facilitated the existence of Samoa as an entity: even Samoan political boundaries incorporated seaways as well as proximity on land.

The historical evidence that remains suggests that there was much more to Samoan navigation than was ever fully comprehended. One of the few scholars who encountered Samoa and was himself interested in navigation, was unable to learn as much as he had hoped. The most import ethnographer of Samoa, Augustin Kramer, spent an entire night with a Samoan chief, Leiato, who was at the time (circa 1900) one of a limited number of Samoans still well versed in astronomy and navigation. Leiato had little success with his student: “I must admit I did not grasp everything,” Kramer later wrote, “because I am not much of an astronomer nor did the whole affair seem to me to be quite simple.”<sup>40</sup> These were methods which presupposed, he wrote:

Good training, much experience and great powers of observation. And those were well developed, which explains why it was possible for the Polynesians...to maintain traffic between their groups of islands without either compass. This is one of the descriptions of navigational technique.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See also Epeli Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994): 55-58. Hau’ofa aims to promote the development of contemporary Oceanic visual and performing arts that transcend national and ethnic boundaries. In doing this the Oceania Centre (head by Hau’ofa) is experimenting with creating an autonomous cultural space within the global system, a space that is ours, in which we breath freely, and of which we have full control. We believe that it is only in such a space that we can be most creative in whatever we set our minds and passions on. It is only in such a space that we can be most welcoming of others.

<sup>40</sup> Kramer, *Samoa Islands*, 1: 283.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 285.



The Tala i le Folauga a Gaiuli ma Gaisina (The Story about the Voyage of Gaiuli and Gaisina) is the most important of these, and was also collected by Kramer. It is only a brief account, yet it indicates some major navigational practices common in Samoa. For instance, there was reliance upon landmarks for initial bearings, a technique in common use at the outset of voyages throughout Samoa. More importantly, the story details the use of sequences of rising and setting stars to maintain bearings. This was a major element of navigating, still in everyday use in Samoa. Its use is confirmed by the “star courses” known as *fetu ta’iala* (guiding stars). Kramer also recorded an untitled Samoan fisherman’s account:

Now when a travel party goes to Tutuila or Manu’a, they watch the stars extremely closely. So the ship travels and finds its correct course to Manu’a and Tutuila.<sup>42</sup>

From the language of the description it is apparent that observation was a cornerstone of Samoan navigation. This coincides with other evidence: for instance, an expert in matters of the sea and navigation was known as *matatai*, an observer of the sea.

Perhaps it is most revealing that as sympathetic an observer as Kramer was surprised that he could not learn an entire astronomical and navigational system in a single night. Of course, in retrospect this seems hardly surprising. David Lewis, one of the great twentieth-century sailors, and a competent astronomer, himself found that learning from the non-literate Pacific Island navigators involved intense preparation, lengthy notes, a star chart, as well long periods of instruction and demonstration.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike Kramer and Lewis, many missionaries and observers associated with the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 1: 283.

<sup>43</sup> David Lewis, We, The Navigators: The Ancient Art of Landfinding in the Pacific (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1972), 280.

colonial establishment thought Samoans were incapable of ocean voyaging and navigation. Turner called Samoans a “domestic people” who “rarely venture out of sight of land.” Another observer echoed Turner’s thoughts, saying that “Samoans are singular among the peoples of the Polynesian race in not being fairly entitled to the name of Navigators.”<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, many sources indicate quite the opposite that Samoans were commonly navigating the seas around the archipelago. Fishermen from the western island of Savai’i are known to have been working the ground of Pascal Bank, which was 80 miles west of Samoa, a reef that was between 8 to 13 fathoms deep and in no place appeared above the surface.<sup>45</sup> Such a passage was a difficult task, requiring challenging navigation skills. Yet the Samoans managed to paddle through it.

According to the chiefs of the villages of Sili and Olosega, the seaworthiness of Samoa underscores the evidence and suggestions that Samoans were capable of passages of significant distances—upwards of 1000 miles. By the time *papalagi*—non-Polynesian—were regular visitors, at the start of the nineteenth century, there were three main types of vessel in use for offshore sailing. The smallest was the *‘iatolima* or *soatau*, a large outrigger canoe which was of dugout construction. These could be as long as 20 meters (60 feet), and could carry up to 20 or more sailors. The largest had hulls wide enough to accommodate two sailors paddling side by side. The *‘iatolima* was mostly paddled, though it would be equipped with a sail when appropriate or necessary. By the end of the nineteenth century these crafts were not often sailed, but knowledge of their

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<sup>44</sup> Llewella Pierce Churchill, Samoa Uma: Where Life is Different (New York: Forest and Stream, 1902), 88; Also, Turner, Samoa, 166.

<sup>45</sup> T. Damon Ieremia Salesa, “Travel Happy in Samoa: Colonialism, Samoa Migration, and Brown Pacific,” 37, no. 2 (Oct. 2003), Auckland, NZ: Journal of History, 2003. See also Finding and Forgetting the Way: Navigation and Knowledge in Samoa and Polynesia (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2003).

ability was very widespread.<sup>46</sup>

From this discussion, Samoa navigation is closely connected to the “spiritual” or supernatural. In Samoa various classes of “spirits” could be found walking or sailing upon the earth. Indeed, the path between the divine and the ordinary troubled the language of Christian conversion, with missionaries eventually settling upon a class of spiritual beings to use as the word for the Christian God (*Atua*—meaning, beforehand, those who dwelled in *Pulotu*).<sup>47</sup> Certainly the earthly was known only in Samoa by contradistinction to the heavens, considered there to be many (*lagi*—heavens vs. *lalolagi*—under the heavens, i.e. earth).

The language of the spiritual had important navigational or maritime metaphors. Death was assumed to precede a final voyage, to an offshore destination or one beneath the seas and lands—*Pulotu*. Navigation, not least because of its celestial dimensions, was a way of crossing the boundaries between the *lagi* and other dimensions. The observant navigator or fisherman would be careful of his right conduct to the gods, spirits, and ancestors.

### Samoan Custom of Deliberation and Decision-Making

The process of deliberation for reaching decisions is called *soalaupule* (sharing of power) or sometimes referred to as *fa’afaletui* (weaving house). The *matais* and elders take the lead, but everyone’s opinion is valued. This process can take hours, days, or

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<sup>46</sup> Pinefa’amau, Talafa’auto, Mauga, Leau, Moliipe, Tuaifua, Taua’i, discussion with author, 14 Jan. 2004.

<sup>47</sup> *Pulotu* is a spiritual underworld to the west of Samoa, according to some chiefs, known as the dwelling place of the blessed. It is believed that here, the spirit goes after death; a place where it never rains and people eat and drink without hard labor.

even weeks depending on this issue. The participants will continue to dialogue and discuss an issue until they come to a consensus. *Soalaupule* is not so much about reaching a consensus of opinion as it is about process for agreeing on a way forward. At the conclusion of the process participants do not necessarily agree to have the same viewpoint/opinion but there is agreement on how to proceed. These processes allow families and individuals to resolve issues and maintain good relations.<sup>48</sup>

For scores of generations Samoans have solved community problems by getting together and listening patiently while everybody concerned has said all he wishes to say. But words alone are suspect. Whether a speaker is telling the truth or not is revealed as much by the expressions that pass across his face, by the look in his eyes, and his manner of speaking as by the words that come out of his mouth. Shameless boasting is permitted, but lies, unless mutually advantageous, are listened to in discouraging silence, and the self-seeking speaker who is trying to deceive, looks with diminishing hope at the blank faces and unresponsive eyes of his audience. After hours, perhaps days, of talking, a unanimous decision is always reached. There are not majority verdicts because there are no minorities. Chief Tuaifua states that in the old days those who did not agree escaped to the mountains or to the bush. Today, rather than suffer the shame of being one of a defeated minority, those who disagree change their minds.<sup>49</sup>

In a Samoan community where everybody seems to know what everybody else is thinking, the most trouble is caused by hurt feelings. If the offended person is a man of

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<sup>48</sup> The adoption of Western justice system now means many of our conflicts are resolved in court rather than through the process of *soalaupule* and dialogue with different outcomes. A simple analogy is justice systems results in winners and losers. The cultural process results in win-win situations and all parties can move with no hard feelings.

<sup>49</sup> Discussion with author, 22 Jan. 2004.

rank his whole family consider themselves insulted by the offense. In this way a village is quickly split into warring factions. Stones are thrown, taro stolen, and perhaps some people injured. If the trouble escalates out of control, the other side comes forward with gifts of *ie toga*, remorseful faces, and long speeches full of metaphors and respect. In this way the wrongdoers according to Fa'a-Samoa gratify those they have wronged to forgive them. The most astonishing feature of these dignified proceedings is not so much the manner in which the wrongdoers (because of their humility) share the honors of the occasion with the wronged but the completeness with which everything really is forgiven and apparently forgotten. With one exception no matter what the cause of the trouble, speeches have been exchanged, and it is as though nothing happened.

Unlike the American democratic system of voting someone into office, Fa'a-Samoa has a very different approach of appointing someone to a vacant chief position. The various branches of the *aiga* comes together to deliberate concerning a possible successor. This deliberation for a new *matai* may go on for several days or even weeks. Meetings are usually presided over by a *matai* who is related to the family, and everyone has a chance to comment on the qualities of the member under consideration.<sup>50</sup>

Once a person is elected to *matai*, he serves as a family patriarch who must promote family unity and prestige, administer all family lands, settle disputes among kinsmen, promote religious participation, and represent the family as its political orator in the village *fono*. Something of the nature of the role may be gathered from my discussion with Vee:

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<sup>50</sup> Orators of Ofu, Malae Tito, Fuifui Lopa, and Fiaaoga Moa, discussion with author, 27 Feb. 2004.

*Fa'atoa atoa le fa'ausaga talu ona ou matai, ae vaai ua sina lo'u ulu e ui a ina talitonu Samoa o le sina o le ulu e sausu malie. E ui i lea e tatau lava ona ou amio fa'atagata matua. E tatau ona ou savali lelei, e le tatau ona ou soona sa'asa'a se iloga o ni aso taulia...e oo fo'i lo'u ta'alo ma tupulaga. Na o tagata ua ta'i limasefulu tausaga e tatau ona ou filo ma fa'aeteete i a'u upu e tautala ai ne'i o'u sese. E leai se isi i lo'u aiga na te valaau a'u i lo'u igoa muamua. E faigata le ave'a ma matai la'ititi.<sup>51</sup>*

I have been a *matai* for only four years and look, my hair is grey, although in Samoa grey hair comes very slowly. But always, I must act as if I were old. I must walk seriously; I may not dance except upon most solemn occasions, neither can I play games with the young men. Old men of sixty are my companions and watch my every word, for fear that I make a mistake. There is no one in my whole family who dares to scold me or even to address me familiarly by my first name. It is hard to be so young and yet be a *matai*.

All land in and around Samoa which is not designated as “village land” belongs to one or another of the extended families who have *matai* in the village. Private ownership of land is nonexistent. The *matai* is said to have authority over the land of his family. This means that he has the power to determine the uses to which family land is to be put, that is, what portions are to be cultivated and for what crops.

#### Tofa ma le Fa'autaga – Wise Discernment vs. Problem-Solving

Americans solve problems very differently from Samoans. In the American culture, problems are perceived as solvable. Difficult problems may require more research, time, innovation, money or effort, but no matter how challenging, the resolution of any problem is considered achievable. Americans tend to persist, attempting alternate strategies until a problem is solved.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Discussion with author, 27 Feb. 2004.

<sup>52</sup> An example is found in the Simplex Eight Stages of Integrated Problem-Solving Process. Simplex uses the following eight states: problem finding, fact finding, problem definition, idea finding, selection, planning, sell ideas, and act. Rather than seeing creativity as a single straight-line process, Simplex sees it as the continuous cycle it should be. Completion and implementation of one cycle of

By contrast, the inspiring Samoan belief in *tofa ma le fa'autaga*<sup>53</sup> may hinder the problem solving process. In the Samoan belief system, barriers encountered in solving a problem may be viewed as signs that the condition should be accepted and endured as fate rather than be attacked through problem-solving. In some cases, to attack the problem may be viewed as dangerous and as possibly causing anger to the spiritual forces.

According to Laautuvanu Faiai and Malemo Lafoia, Samoan knowledge for decision-making was restricted, tightly organized and well monitored. It was consciously politicized and in an often adversarial environment. The great emphasis Samoans placed on the verification and testing of knowledge served also to foster the accurate retention of the oral archive. Lafoia and Faiai claimed that Samoans often disagree to agree; they debated and challenged every issue in order to clear their perspectives on what is uncertain in order to come to a consensus.<sup>54</sup> This Samoan approach is reported by John Charlot in his observation of the Polynesian thinking process. Charlot pointed out that “Samoans place great importance on challenge, debate, and disagreement; although knowledge was acquired and maintained in private, the select moments of public rehearsal were critical events.”<sup>55</sup>

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creativity leads straight into the next cycle of creativity improvements. See Carter McNamara, Nuts and Bolts Guide to Leadership and Supervision in Business (Minneapolis: Authenticity Consulting, LLC, 2002).

<sup>53</sup> This refers to the ancient Samoan model of wisdom—a far seeing shrewdness and searching wisdom. No quick answer is made on the spot or at the present moment. Yet the answer is lying in the future and it will take critical thinking and discernment to unravel it. When seeking for right judgment or wise opinion, one must wait patiently for the answer to unfold. See also, Moreli J. Niuatoa, “Bible: A Biblical Model of Youth Education for My Samoan Church,” in Multicultural Models for Religious Education, ed. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier (Atlanta: SCP/Third World Literature Publishing House, 2001), 304-05.

<sup>54</sup> Orators of the village of Olosega, discussion with author, 13 Feb. 2004.

Robert Borofsky also made a similar observation of Samoan decision-making. He described how Samoan instruction for decision-making was conducted in very different modes to western techniques: relying on observation, imitation, listening and repetition, a process presided over by an expert.<sup>56</sup> If one studies Fa'a-Samoa very closely, the process of decision-making could take days or months because they have to sort through all facts and assess the situation. When the Samoans come to a respectable consensus, it is because of their profound contemplation and discernment which has inspired and provided them with the precise insight and wisdom to do it. As Elizabeth Conde-Frazier puts it, it “reflects the newly gained perspective which came as a result of developing a critical consciousness in the process of learning.”<sup>57</sup>

In Samoa even disciplines as technically demanding required much of the learning by the individual to be done through observation and listening. Indeed, the primary place of instruction in decision-making matters of oratory and history is inside the meeting house of the village council, the *fono*. At all times of learning the principles of decision-making weight was placed on listening properly, and asking the same question twice implied a failure on the part of the listener. The times when knowledge for decision-making was articulated publicly were especially important. Samoans who aspired to possess or understand this knowledge had to process it quickly—a feature that is still relevant today in Samoan decision-making, even in contemporary, highly literate,

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<sup>55</sup> John Charlot, “Classical Polynesian Thinking,” in A Companion to World Philosophies, ed. Eliot Deutsch et al (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997).

<sup>56</sup> Robert Borofsky, Making History: Pukapukan and Anthropological Constructions of Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 74-79.

<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Hispanic Bible Institute: A Community of Theological Construction (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2004), 90.



Samoa.

### Summary

The significant dimensions of customs and traditions of Fa'a-Samoa have been discussed to a great extent. Important concepts and attitudes of Samoan culture have also been reported. Samoans have a very strong sense of identity and belonging. They have a firm connection and attachment to its surrounding and also to the gods. From these attitudes and beliefs come what may be an epistemology of Samoan spirituality. The strong regard and affection of the Samoans to their traditions and customary practices revealed a strong spirituality that undergirds Fa'a-Samoa. This affective relationship and connection leads to the development of faith and a deeper understanding of life. Samoans whose faith provides a superior ability to cope with stress and illness, via spiritual resource or a sense of reverence will have both higher levels of health and well-being.

Attempts have been made to bridge the supernatural and the normal lifeway of Fa'a-Samoa by bringing the customs and traditions to bear on the spiritual and mental: customs on herbal medicine, navigation, and architectural skills. On the other hand, deliberation and decision-making was discussed to reveal the involvement of divine influence in the Samoan mentality of harmony and reconciliation. The process for coming to a consensus could take hours or even days. In this long process the Samoans are actually involved in contemplation and discernment seeking the influence of God.

The learning process for the Samoans starts from the *aiga*—the ecology of how we know what we know. It is the arena where we learn about decision-making, culture, social issues, health, conflict resolution and life itself. It is in the *aiga* where we first

learn the customs of behaving well before the elders and those in authority; learn how to address and speak before the adults and other responsibilities. It is in the *aiga* that we learn how to correctly evaluate the direction and movement of the clouds to calculate the trends of winds. All of these things are important aspects of Samoan spirituality. A Samoan cannot live without them. It has to be a normal undertaking in order to survive the challenges of life that is brought before us.

Samoan oral tradition (or oral culture) was never preserved nor transmitted through communication mediums we have available today. Thus we rely deeply on something like work of arts that will provide a code of conduct for the Samoan spiritual lifeway. We have looked at the ontological significance of words and images stemming from Samoan ancient traditions and customs (symbols and signs of the past) to explore the meaning and essence of Samoan spirituality.

The historical evidence that remains suggests that there was much more to Samoan navigation and architecture skills than was ever fully comprehended. Kramer, for example, one of the few scholars who encountered Samoan specialists and was himself interested in navigation, was unable to learn as much as he had hoped. This phenomenon suggests, at least from my perspective, that without a full knowledge of the Samoan way of life one will not be able to understand the totality of Samoan spirituality. It is very profound and difficult to capture on a superficial level of study.

The whole concept of Samoan spirituality is an art of a spiritual reality that is beyond comprehension. Fa'a-Samoa as code of conduct for Samoan spirituality is the true conduct and representation of its time and space. It keeps the pulse of Samoan spirituality tied into its rituals and ceremonies. By feeling that pulse the Samoan knows

what is happening to the world. With his or her special faculty which is intuition and imagination he or she projects ideas and thoughts into the future and models a genuine spiritual emergence.

The next chapter discusses Fa'a-Samoa as life in Christ for Samoan spirituality. This discussion involves a dialogue between Gutierrez and Fa'a-Samoa in the attempt to propose a solidarity pathway to help Samoan Christians make sense of their faith in God.

## CHAPTER 4

### FA'A-SAMOA AS CHRISTIAN LIFE OF SAMOAN SPIRITUALITY: A THEOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL DIALOGUE

In chapter three we looked at Fa'a-Samoa as code of conduct of Samoan spirituality. This chapter attempts to create a structure for Samoan spirituality. In the process, I will look at the structure of Samoan spirituality and healthful dimensions of Latin American theology for building spirituality. I do this by conversing with Gustavo Gutierrez and some religious educators.<sup>1</sup> The goal is to draw out vital life-giving values emerged from this conversation necessary for Samoan spiritual enrichment and motivation. I have argued continuously that what Samoans need is a vibrant spirituality of Fa'a-Samoa for their particular situations. Because the Samoans strongly embraced Fa'a-Samoa as their "living water," a theological discussion of how Fa'a-Samoa contributes to the enrichment of spirituality is vital.

The Samoan Christian lifestyle is something conducted publicly. We are not a people who merely speak and sing praises to God intuitively; we are social people and not just individuals. We are people of action and speech and not just people of abstract ideas and feelings. Samoans are known in their ways of illustrating their Fa'a-Samoa. They collaborate on major issues that affect the lives of every individual in the community. Samuel Powell says, "We must think dialectically about human life, training

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<sup>1</sup> I have chosen Gustavo Gutierrez (out of other liberation theologians) for his perspective on liberation spirituality and theology. His perspective may be considered in three dimensions: liberation spirituality/theology involves (1) political and social liberation, the elimination of the immediate causes of poverty and injustices; (2) it involves the liberation of the poor, the marginalized, the downtrodden and the oppressed from all those things that limit their capacity to develop themselves freely and in dignity; and (3) it involves liberation from selfishness and sin, a re-establishment of a relationship with God and with other people. In the process of rethinking religious education for Fa'a-Samoan spirituality, these three dimensions can help stimulate thinking by providing fresh theological and educational perspectives on the Samoan church's work with Samoan immigrants. It will help facilitate the sharing of examples of good practice in the Samoan church religious education, nurture and training.

ourselves to recognize the unity of thought and deed, of feeling and speech, and learning to prevent the separation of the unities, to which our culture so readily inclines.”<sup>2</sup> Here, Powell suggests that communal dialogue and consensus is essentially important to the well-being of a community. A community that can think dialectically and can offer a promising consensus through open dialogue will overcome the downside of spiritual struggle.

The theological basis of Fa’a-Samoan practice is the communal recognition of God who revealed Jesus Christ in a culture that can be visible and understandable to the Samoans. The motivation is, in part, rooted in the self-assurance that Fa’a-Samoa remains God’s visible culture and that Samoan Christians, as creatures, remain a part of that culture. For this reason, it is best to build a theology of Fa’a-Samoa that is appropriate for Samoan spirituality. In doing this, an attempt is made to integrate spirituality of Fa’a-Samoa with Gutierrez’ liberation spirituality and solidarity.

The purpose of incorporating Gutierrez’ spirituality of solidarity and liberation with Fa’a-Samoa is threefold: (1) it offers a new interpretation for Samoan existence in a new context; (2) it offers a different lens for the interpretation of the Gospel; and (3) it stimulates a new form of theological and psychological reflection. These three things are necessary elements for re-actualizing a religious tradition that gives identity to Samoan spiritual life within the contexts of the mainland and in Samoa. Moreover, these elements will enrich the integration of Fa’a-Samoa social disciplines and spiritual values to assist Samoans deal with life issues totally foreign to the Samoans—such as individualism, capitalism, and the like. This incorporation will unveil that Fa’a-Samoa is perhaps the

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel M. Powell, *A Theology of Christian Spirituality* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 28.

most appropriate vehicle for expressing and developing Samoan spirituality that the new century called for.

The structure of Gutierrez' liberation spirituality and solidarity can be understood by paying attention to his basic claims: first, the claim that there is a new subject of history. In other words, history must be experienced and understood from its underside, from the fate of those who have been excluded from the making and interpreting of history. Second, he claims that there is a new experience of Christianity. A new way of being Christian is a way of faith that is praxis of solidarity with the poor. With both the Christian message and the historical situation irrupted and made new, Gustavo considers his third claim of a new way of doing theology. In this new paradigm, theology comes as a second act—a form of critical reflection on Christian praxis.

In Gutierrez's theology, only by seeing through the eyes of the poor can the contradictions be opened for close examination, elaborated for truthful understanding, and made open for social transformation. Taking this understanding and method under consideration for a spirituality of Fa'a-Samoa will help these very aspects emerge into the present Fa'a-Samoa as possibilities for transformation in social systems, religious practices, theological methods, and ways of being human. Gutierrez's notion of spirituality mandates the paradigm shift of Samoan theology of spirituality. On the same token, his structure will contribute to a religious education of Samoan spirituality. In our joining into the process of working together with Gutierrez, we live out the gifts of faith, hope, and support that make us sons and daughters of the Living God. This experience is our "well."

Samoan spirituality at its essence has high regard for Fa'a-Samoa. To

acknowledge the Samoan struggle for human self-esteem and claim true identity as people of God, they turn to Fa'a-Samoa. It is in their adherence to Fa'a-Samoa that they encounter new meanings of life and expressions in a new land of what they had already come to know in their daily living of the Gospel. In a similar approach, Gutierrez' spirituality of liberation affirmed the Latin Americans' unique and renewing encounter with God in the struggle for freedom. Gutierrez writes, "Spirituality is like living water that springs up in the very depths of the experience of faith."<sup>3</sup> The experience of faith will lead to a theology as the voice of the voiceless and power for the powerless.

The impulse behind Gutierrez' liberation spirituality and solidarity was not based on any mere theory or idea. It was based on profound personal experiences of the presence of a loving God in the midst of the struggle for justice. Out of this understanding, I anticipate building a theology of Samoan spirituality that touches every dimension of Samoan Christian life. It is a biblical spirituality that allows God's saving act in history to infiltrate all levels of Samoan human existence. The primary goal is to develop a channel which expresses a reality beyond our consciousness, the reality of God's grace for the whole human race.

### Gustavo Gutierrez's Liberation Spirituality and Solidarity

Gutierrez's understanding of solidarity begins in the experience with God. One's experience with God intensifies and transforms his/her previous ways, or paradigms of

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<sup>3</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), xiv. In this book, Gutierrez explores the interconnection between poverty, oppression, and Christian spirituality. In A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation, rev. ed., trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988). Gutierrez explains the theological movement that seeks to read the transforming power of the gospel over against the context of poverty, oppression, and social change. Both these works are crucial to the development and enrichment of a Fa'a-Samoa theology of spirituality.

Christianity. Solidarity is one's union of interests, purposes, or sympathies among members of a struggle community or individuals. It is a journey of Christian love with the poor, the "other." Christian love as solidarity with the poor is the religious equivalent of the irruption of the poor in liberating praxis.

Liberation<sup>4</sup> demands that the church concentrate its efforts on freeing the people of the world from poverty and oppression. It is an outcry from its proponents that all Christians must work for socio-economic justice for all people. Liberation theologies have denounced nuclear warfare, repeatedly urged an end to the arms race, and sought to halt the exploitation of poor nations by rich ones. The protection and promotion of basic human rights in the social, economic, and political orders have been central to these pronouncements. Liberation theology, as urged by Gutierrez, has attempted to fit these concerns into a less traditional framework of speculation.

Gutierrez proposes a theology of liberation spirituality that is necessary for the enrichment of Samoan spirituality. His theology speaks about liberation that begins in God and solidarity with the struggle of people. In a similar manner, Samoan theology of spirituality is rooted in real life experience and reflection with the Lord. Weaving Gutierrez's theological formulation with Fa'a-Samoa will help rediscover the real-life

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<sup>4</sup> It must be noted that liberation-theology movement was partly inspired by the Second Vatican Council and the 1967 papal encyclical *Populorum progressio*. There are at least four major factors that have played a significant role in the formulation of Latin American liberation theology. First, it is a post-Enlightenment theological movement. The leading proponents, such as Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, and Juan Luis Segundo, Jose Miranda, are responsive to the epistemological and social perspectives of Immanuel Kant, Georg William Friedrich Hegel, and Karl Marx. Second, liberation theology has been greatly influenced by European political theology finding in J. B. Metz, Jurgen Moltmann, and Harvey Cox perspectives which have criticized the ahistorical and individualistic nature of existential theology. Third, it is for the most part a Roman Catholic theological movement. With notable exceptions such as Jose Miguez-Bonino (Methodist) and Rubem Alves (Presbyterian) liberation theology has been identified with the Roman Catholic Church. These four factors combine to bring about a distinctive theological method and interpretation. See also Phillip Berryman, Liberation Theology: Essential Facts About the Revolutionary Religious Movement in Latin America and Beyond (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987).



world of the struggle of Samoans and their compelling spiritual needs. Moreover, it will help surface the “other side” of their unheard voice so they can speak for themselves more rather than relying on intermediaries. In doing this the Samoans will want to be the active subjects of their own history and to forge a radically different society.<sup>5</sup>

While reflecting on the discussion with the Samoan participants in order to work out a theology of Samoan spirituality, Gutierrez was already speaking of the need for and the importance of liberation spirituality. He claimed that a theology of spirituality that does not come out of a real encounter with the Lord is not a reliable theology. He wrote, “A Christian is defined as a follower of Jesus, and reflection on the experience of following constitutes the central theme of any solid theology.”<sup>6</sup> The theology of spirituality that emerged out of this reflection and experience was preceded by the spiritual experience of Christians who are committed to the process of liberation.

Fa’a-Samoa’s contribution to the enrichment of Samoan spirituality involves authentic commitment to life. It entails truthful dedication and support for those who give values to human actions. According to Fa’a-Samoa, actions without any clear human significance thus gain spiritual and sanctifying value if done for important and legitimate motives. The heart of Fa’a-Samoa is faithful commitment to others. In the same way, the heart of Gutierrez’s work is centered on real commitment and care for others. Gutierrez says, “Concern for effective action is a way of expressing love for the other.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, since the love of God is always present among us, we should

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<sup>5</sup> See also Gustavo Gutierrez, “Liberating Praxis and Christian Faith,” in Frontiers of Theology in Latin America, ed. Rosino Gibellini, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> Gutierrez, We Drink, 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

manifest that gracious act of God through our gracious acts to the community to which we belong. The idea of the gracious love of God is of central importance to Samoan Christian daily spiritual living.

In line with Gutierrez's theology of spirituality and love is the dominant theme in Pauline theology, "The grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many" (Rom. 5:15, NRSV). It implies that God first loved us, before we loved God. Therefore, everything starts from God. The gift of God's love is the source of our spirituality and our being as well. It places its impression on our daily lives. Only by loving others, then, can Samoan Christians fulfill themselves as spiritual persons. That is how we should respond to the initiative taken by God through Jesus Christ, a response that reflects God's spirituality of love.

Gutierrez writes, "My book is a love letter to God, to the Church, and to the people to which I belong. Love remains alive, but grows deeper and changes its manner of expression."<sup>8</sup> This is an important statement of faith, because it implies that our actions and words cannot be separate from one another. In fact, we cannot separate our discourse about God from the historical process of liberation. Every human dialogue and action about the love of God has to be part of who we are as Christians. If not, then we're just deceiving ourselves in the presence of God.

The living God is seen as the God who enters into our struggle to eliminate the forces of injustice, wherever they are visible, and to call forth the healing and reconciling forces of life. It is precisely in this context of the struggle that Gutierrez sees the manifestation of the forces of death. Death, according to Gutierrez, "is not only physical

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<sup>8</sup> Gutierrez, Theology of Liberation, taken from the back cover-page.

but mental and cultural as well.”<sup>9</sup> Put another way, it is the condemnation of every people, culture, and tradition. In the context of the poor in the United States, people are aware that these forces of death have made them hostages in their own land.<sup>10</sup>

Gutierrez’s motif of highlighting these forces of death is for people to recognize more clearly the ways in which they are bound to opposition, fear, and manipulation, so they may come to understand the evil structures that discriminate against them. This was the identical motif raised by Paulo Freire in his attempt to educate the oppressed about how to emerge from their ignorant situation into life. Freire argued, as long as the oppressed “remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically accept their exploitation.”<sup>11</sup> With this new self-awareness, they have rediscovered that the God in whom they have believed for centuries is a God who wants to liberate them from the forces of death and offer them life in all its dimensions. Until this occurs, “they will continue fearful and beaten.”<sup>12</sup>

Several important things are worth noticing in Gutierrez’s theological perspective fundamental to Samoan spirituality: (1) life is meaningless without a real life experience with God. Spirituality receives its initial motivation from an encounter with the risen

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>10</sup> In the streets of Los Angeles and other parts of the country, many homeless Americans are living on the street. The government had not done enough to help the homeless or develop programs to help them find employment to become self-support. Billions of dollars are spent to finance the war in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other parts of the world while millions of Americans are starving and many more are without proper medical care, and immigrants struggling to become legal residents. Despite a year in which the US economy added jobs, the percentage of Americans living in poverty grew from 12.5 to 12.7 percent last year – in the fourth straight year it’s risen. These are the forces of death that have made them hostages in their own land.

<sup>11</sup> Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, new rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 1993), 46.

<sup>12</sup> See Regis Debray, Revolution in the Revolution? Arm Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America, trans. Bobbye Ortiz. (New York: MR Press, 1967)..Also excerpts from the classic by Pelican Latin American Library, [online]; [www.tamilnation.org/ideology/debray.htm](http://www.tamilnation.org/ideology/debray.htm).

Lord; encounters with the Lord are the point of departure for a life lived according to the Spirit; (2) spirituality is a complete saving action of God in history; (3) solidarity is the spiritual answer to a real problem; (4) liberation spirituality begins with the concrete needs of the other and not with practicing love; (5) our lines of action reveal respect and high regard for human values; and (6) . A true sense of human-meaning comes out of the struggle for justice and painful struggles for survival.

These six important points are valuable foundations for a Fa'a-Samoan theology of spirituality. Fa'a-Samoan theologies of spirituality should be innovative undertakings that are marked by sensitivity to the most useful traditions of the Samoan people. For a Samoan spirituality to be real and meaningful, it must make its own the spiritual experience of the Samoans and others. This choice is the basis of a spiritual experience that is leading the way to a new course in the following of the Spirit in Samoa and in the United States. The faith in the Spirit of life will provide spiritual empowerment in the situation of death and the struggle for life which the Samoan immigrants are facing.

To unveil the essence of spiritual life embedded in Fa'a-Samoa and Gutierrez, I will point out their theological significance and cultural parallels. This will help us understand the principles between Fa'a-Samoa values and understanding of spirituality and Gutierrez's theological viewpoint of liberation spirituality and solidarity.

#### Fa'a-Samoa and Gutierrez: Seeking a Theological Common Ground

It is the author's contention that Gutierrez's theological claims will help inspire new beliefs and a renewal of Fa'a-Samoa spirituality. I also believe that in a context in which spirituality needs enrichment, one must understand what one is doing when one

talks about God if one is to talk about spirituality. Gutierrez and Fa'a-Samoa both claim that authentic and truthful principles of spirituality are:

- Initiated by the Spirit of God—*Agaga*
- Born out of real life experience—*aiga* and *nu'u*
- The salvific act of God—*Tagaloalagi*
- Solidarity as the answer to human dilemma—*lotonu'u*
- Satisfying people's need and not merely the practicing of love—*ola tautua*
- Action which demonstrates high regard for human values—*fa'aaloalo*.

These principles serve as cultural and theological significance to the making of Fa'a-Samoa theology of spirituality that will help shape and influence the moral and ethical beliefs of Samoan Christians. My conversation with the Reverend Iosefa Afo reveals that these principles can instigate spiritual practices to help Samoans to consciously develop the spiritual dimension of our lives and attend to the work of grace in our lives.

#### Spirituality is Initiated by the Spirit of God—*Agaga*

Because not all spirituality is Christian spirituality, one must know how to differentiate between Christian spirituality and the many other spiritual claims. Spirituality today has many different faces. So how do we know which spirituality is true and which one is not? Gutierrez argues that spirituality always begins in God. Marjorie Thompson echoes the same claim, "Christian spirituality is thus initiated and sustained by One who lives both within and beyond us."<sup>13</sup> This means that while God chooses to be known to us in and through personal experience, God always transcends personal

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<sup>13</sup> Marjorie J. Thompson, Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 8.

experience. God is greatly free from the distortions that personal experience is inevitably subject to.

Likewise, Fa'a-Samoa claims that spirituality begins in one's experience with the *Agaga*.<sup>14</sup> *Agaga*, the spiritual motivator, is part of the primeval ancestor's power self-disclosed in the spirit of Fa'a-Samoa. It lives in and beyond the Fa'a-Samoa and Samoan experience. It simply comes and goes on its own free will. It discloses the behavior and meaning of Samoan spirituality. In my discussion with him, Elder Leatulagi Fa'alevao shares that spirituality somehow begins in an illusionary contact and aesthetic experience with the mystery, the *Agaga*.<sup>15</sup> Thomas Merton expressed this quality of spirituality as "the strange meanings and experiences that are beyond us and yet often extremely and mysteriously relevant to us."<sup>16</sup> If the *Agaga* truly has this character, we can expect to encounter the divine presence in our lives. This divine presence is the source and "prime mover" of any spirituality—*ola fa'aleagaga*.

Alfred Whitehead talks about the "initial aim" which begins with the touch of God.<sup>17</sup> Whether or not Whitehead is aware that he is referring to spirituality initiated by the love of God as the source for hope in a world of diverse cultural communities, he is simply talking about spirituality. Spirituality is the cause of God orchestrating likely opportunities toward an ultimate reason and way of interweaving with the past human

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<sup>14</sup> *Agaga* with the capital "A" and in its theological implication refers to the Holy Spirit. With a small "a" it refers to the soul. See also Chapter 1 for a detailed explanation.

<sup>15</sup> Discussion with Elder Leatulagi Fa'alevao, 11 Dec. 2006. Elder Fa'alevao had also served as Samoan lecturer in theology at the Kanana Fou Theological Seminary from 1993 to 1996.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Merton, *Opening the Bible* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986), 27.

<sup>17</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, cited by Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, in *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 39-48.

experiences which offers spiritual possibilities for every person. God initiates the possibility of every human occasion, but it is the individual that is responsible for nurturing and the fulfillment of that possibility.<sup>18</sup> The truth is every possibility is an opportunity graciously offered by God for our benefit.

For Samoan spirituality to be real, it must be initiated by the *Agaga*. It must be deeply connected to the roots of God's love. Gutierrez says that we must engage deeply with the people of God if we want "to win out [our] commitment to liberation."<sup>19</sup> In other words, if Fa'a-Samoa is disengaged from the living situation of the Samoan people, our commitment to liberation and solidarity is only a misrepresentation of God's love. Solidarity and liberation can only be experienced among those who are eagerly willing to help us with wisdom to empower our lives. This realistic experience is a must needed in the Samoan community in order for the Samoan immigrants to survive. Equipped with such experience, Conde-Frazier says, "The group realized its hopes of finding solidarity in the presence of other peacemaking and gaining insights from each other for their continual work."<sup>20</sup>

At the roots of spirituality there is a particular experience initiated by the Spirit that is held by people living at a particular time. St. Bernard of Clairvaux states that in

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<sup>18</sup> Moreli J. Niutoa, paper on "A Comparative Perspective on Process Understanding of God as Relational and Samoan Perception of God as Communal Reveal in *Aiga*: Toward a Theological Synthesis," TH301: Major Christian Doctrines, Claremont School of Theology, 13 Dec. 2000. From the perspective of process theology, God experiences our experience. God, the "initial aim" is that God is in relationship to the world (consequent nature), and is the source of all possibility (primordial nature). God can feel all possibility in the world completely and thoroughly. God works with us in whatever decision we make, regardless how and what we decide. Every becoming occasion in the world begins with the touch of God. The touch of God influences the preconscious stage of all things that creates consciousness.

<sup>19</sup> Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 24.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "A Spiritual Journey toward Peaceful Living: From Hospitality to Shalom," in *Choosing Peace Through Daily Practice*, ed. Ellen Ott Marshall (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 158-59.

these matters “all people should drink from their own well.”<sup>21</sup> In this case, the Samoan well is Fa’a-Samoa. The great spiritualities in the life of the Samoan church will live on because it keeps sending the people back to the source, Fa’a-Samoa. The image of a Samoan well is used here because spirituality is indeed like “living water” that springs up in the very depths of the Samoan experience of faith. St. John writes, “and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”<sup>22</sup> The spiritual life signified in the image of water comes to us through our encounter with the living Lord.

### Spirituality is Born Out of Real Life Experience—*Aiga* and *Nuu*

A meaningful spirituality is a talking-living-walking in freedom according to the Spirit of love and life. Gutierrez claims that this talking-living-walking has its point of entry in an encounter with one another, and especially with the God. Such an encounter is a spiritual experience that generates and gives meaning to the freedom of the Samoans of which I have been speaking. The encounter itself springs from real life engagement with *aiga* (family) or the *nu’u* (village). The Samoan *aiga* participates in economic and social development, and in implementing humanitarian action for a new sense of being human. Importantly, spirituality exists out of real engagement with God who is the ultimate provider of all Samoan *aiga* or *nu’u*.

The Bible states: “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”<sup>23</sup> This biblical statement simply says that any

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<sup>21</sup> Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 37. It must be noted that Gutierrez employed the phrase “to drink from our own wells” that was initially coined by St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

<sup>22</sup> John 7:38 NRSV.



authentic spiritual experience, then, stands at the beginning of a spiritual journey. That experience becomes the focus of later consideration and is proposed to the entire Samoan community as a way of being faithful citizens of the church and servants of Christ.

Through *aiga* real-life experience and the work of the Holy Spirit, Christ's ministry of reconciliation is made known to us all. In and through the life of Christ, God became more human to us, and we were drawn closer to God.<sup>24</sup> Our relationship with God through what we know and experience through *aiga* and Christ becomes evident in what we teach and practice. Our faith in God makes God more a friend to us. The concept of friendship used by Christy Morr explains the depth of this relationship with God: "Friendship can model and facilitate the growth of spirituality using all the resources that God has given us."<sup>25</sup> *Aiga* friendship can be a fundamental experience through which God brings all Samoans together into deeper relationship with God.

#### Spirituality is the Salvific Act of God—Tagaloalagi

Participation in the life of the Samoan community and the demonstration of the will of god Tagaloalagi is a liberative action. For the Samoan church to be part of a liberative body of the community, it must be at the front position where the battle for survival is active. That is the central position of what it means to be a living Samoan church—a church that is the forerunner of God's salvific activity in saving the world from political, social, and economic despair. Gutierrez carefully challenged the church to

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<sup>23</sup> John 6:65 NRSV.

<sup>24</sup> "God's purpose in speaking through scripture is not to provide a basis for theological systems, but to shape a new humanity created in the image of Jesus Christ."

<sup>25</sup> Christy Morr, "The Role of Friendship in Spiritual Formation," Christian Education Journal, 2 (Fall 2000): 45.

active participation in changing the economic and political system that fostered social injustice. Moreover, he stresses that “The meaning and the fruitfulness of the ecclesial task will be clear only when they are situated within the context of the plan of salvation.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, only when the church extend its helping hand to the struggle of humankind and is able to take action on behalf of the oppressed that human salvation will be attained. Robert Schreiter consider that moment of salvation as precisely the “moment of grace.” The moment of grace is “when suddenly the perspective shifts, a new meaning is found, and a pathway appears, leading out of the deep tangle of memories, emotions, and stories of death.”<sup>27</sup> This may be considered a moment of faith-development which is centered in the progressive movement of one stage to another.

Gutierrez’s theological framework for participation in economic and social changes and planning for human salvation will give the Samoan church a new sense of understanding the mission and liberation responsibility of the church. The Samoan church must stop thinking of itself as the exclusive place of salvation. It must orient itself towards a new paradigm and understanding of service to all people of God. One of the Samoan elder deacons revealed this lack of service by saying, *e tuto’atasi a le ekalesia Samoa* (the Samoan church stands by itself).<sup>28</sup> If the Samoan Christian faith is a praxis of solidarity with the struggling Samoans, then Samoan theology is a way of understanding this experience and expression of faith—as faith seeking understanding: to

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<sup>26</sup> Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 143.

<sup>27</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 46.

<sup>28</sup> Sau Lavata’i, discussion with author, 30 Mar. 2006. Lavata’i is the older deacon at the Samoan Congregational Christian Church of National City, San Diego. He is the former moderator and a founder member of the National City church.

think, to understand, to interpret daily experience, and to act in ways that bring greater life as part of the Samoan Christian journey. A good example of this might be the involvement of the Samoan *fai'feau* in the political and economic struggle of the Samoan immigrants. The *fai'feau* can become the voice of the Samoans in the political, economic, and social transformation. They may accomplish this by rallying the Samoan opinions in a formal correspondence and submitting it to the American Samoan territorial congressman in Washington D.C. This is real action that is not distantly abstract from spoken words.

Liberation spirituality does not separate itself from action and words. One of the greatest efforts of the Samoan church is to reflect and act upon the Word of God which recalls the neediness of Christ and for the church to identify with Christ in this witness. It is through this witness that we practically know and encounter God in history, not because God comes from history, but because history originates from God.<sup>29</sup>

#### Spirituality is Solidarity to Human Dilemma—*Lotonu'u*

Gutierrez states, to talk about God's existence, one must "enter into communion with God and with our fellow human beings as well."<sup>30</sup> This will combine towards a process of solidarity. Solidarity or *lotonu'u* (patriotic) is a unique expression of Christian love today. For Fa'a-Samoa to be meaningful and be able to unite the Samoans together, it must seek concrete expressions of God's love in its own structure—*aganu'u* and *agaifanua* (religious life and cultural structure) and traditions. Its dominant themes are

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<sup>29</sup> Practical knowledge grows out of the memories, desires, and hopes of community—knowledge recalls and remembers, it understands and projects. Knowledge is an intrinsic part of how humans make history.

<sup>30</sup> Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 93.

*tautua fa'amaoni* (commitment to family and village), *soifua tapua'i* (the religious aspect of the Samoan faith), *foia fa'afitauli* (the denunciation of injustices), and others of a similar nature. These themes are the foundational basis for a theology of Fa'a-Samoa—a theology that emerges from critical cultural reflection and analysis of the Samoan situation in the United States. This will help Samoan religious educators to find applicable resources of the tradition to guide the Samoan educational ministry.

Fa'a-Samoa is solidarity and culturally oriented. *Aiga* and *nuu* are bonded together as a significant symbol of unity—the *fa'avae*. Relationships are nurtured through working together as a community. In her own experience in the classroom, church, and community development, Conde-Frazier has discovered that “relationship building is essentially important if we are to foster peaceful living among the struggling people.”<sup>31</sup> As entities of Fa'a-Samoa, we cannot fail to show our solidarity with those who are suffering. They are an active part of our being as *tagata o le eleele* (people of the land). For Jesus identifies himself with the people (Matt. 25:31-46). Jesus Christ came to proclaim the good news to the poor and freedom to the oppressed (Luke 4:18). So we must assure the Samoans of our support in the fulfillment of our specific responsibility as Samoan advocates of the gospel.<sup>32</sup>

Solidarity also means to make decisions with the people. It makes consensus-based decision making and action very strong. I embrace the Fa'a-Samoan way of

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<sup>31</sup> Conde-Frazier, “A Spiritual Journey Toward Peaceful Living,” 160.

<sup>32</sup> I am deeply aware that for some Samoan theologians my use of *gospel* will seem simplistic. Like the person who, reading this dissertation in a preliminary form asked: What do you mean by *gospel*? Do you mean the Gospel (with a capital), for example, salvation through Jesus Christ? Or do you mean the gospel (no capital), for example, the practical working of God's specific word in a specific culture? I am aware of this distinction. But from a religious educator's perspective from which I am writing, there is no value in differentiating them, because in a Fa'a-Samoa that embraces all of life and which is concerned with the entire society, both can have liberating meaning.

decision-making. It allows an opportunity for everyone to speak. No one is denied his or her opinion. However, in the United States, decision-making is done mainly by those who set policy for the community. The voice of the common people is literally heard but never paid any great attention, and that itself breaks solidarity. Where and how are these decisions made? If Walter Wink is correct that there are “invisible forces that determine the choices of those who set policy,” then our web of networking and communication is seriously challenged.<sup>33</sup> Splitting in networking and communication can only make matters worse and add on to the spiritual dilemma. However, unity in solidarity with strong support systems and communication can challenge the hidden forces that influence the decisions of those creating “life systems” for the people to follow.

The significant point here is that solidarity, regardless of the mystical force or power that impinges on and determines our lives, will lead us into a world of hope and joy. This solidarity with the Spirit of God cannot be altered by any outside forces. Paul assures us that we will always defeat these spiritual forces:

If God is for us, who is against us? Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardships, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life ... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>34</sup>

With this assurance, the believing Samoans can never lose their God-given ability for having a good time and celebrating, despite the difficult conditions in which they live

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<sup>33</sup> Walter Wink, The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Rom. 8:31-39 NRSV.

today.

Spirituality Begins with People's Need as the Practice of Love—*Alofa*

Love or *alofa* is only real when it centers in the God of life—God who provides. In the Fa'a-Samoa, *alofa* is not only an external life but an inner life that is moved by the *Agaga*, the Spirit. It is a clear-sighted awareness of the situation of injustice and the action upon it by means of justice. In the Fa'a-Samoa, *alofa* is the fruit of helping out the *tua'oi* (neighbor). On the other hand, a Samoan may borrow his neighbors' belonging (kava cup, fishing pole, canoe) as his own by saying merely a *fa'amolemole* (please). This is regarded as *alofa* Fa'a-Samoa (a Samoan love)—a love that requires no repayment. In the biblical sense, this love is the fruit of the Spirit, and is the roots of effective action. Paul declares that there is “no law against such things.”<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, there is no limit drawn between love and action. When one is working for the liberation of humanity from social injustice and political manipulation, it is love that begins with the concrete needs of the people. Gutierrez continuously argues that the church manifests God's love through its own spirituality of poverty. Poverty is an act of love and liberation and has redemptive value. If the ultimate cause of human oppression is selfishness, the deepest reason for voluntary poverty is what Jesus has taught us, love of one's neighbor.

In his letter of exhortation to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora, Apostle James says, “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.”<sup>36</sup> According to James, the law of freedom is the law by which one's work for liberation

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<sup>35</sup> Gal. 5:23 NRSV.

<sup>36</sup> Jam. 2:12 NRSV.

will be judged. Jesus showed us an example of freedom with a unique character in a life lived in the service of others: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”<sup>37</sup> Jesus is talking about service that begins with people’s need. This service is expressed in and acquires its meaning from the way in which Jesus controls the surrender of his own life: “No one takes it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”<sup>38</sup> According to Gutierrez, “this is the attitude of one who comes to decisions without being influenced by external pressures, and who makes these decisions out of love for others.”<sup>39</sup>

Looking at the context of Samoan Christians, one’s decision to freely decide to give his life in solidarity with those who are struggling to live is a decision to put oneself under the “power of death.”<sup>40</sup> Who wants to go against a system that is powered and steered by those in higher political and governmental positions? Who wants to go against the forces of power that harbor drug and human smuggling into our nation? Who has the heart to confront the boss for underpaying but overworking employees? Who can initiate concerned programs to protect our children in ghettos from drive-by shootings? These are the forces of death which determine and drive our lives.

In her own struggle as a womanist theologian, Karen Baker-Fletcher says, “We must rid ourselves of the voices of those who do not understand our ongoing struggle. Some of those voices are not only from outside hegemonic sources, but arise from within.” These voices have tried “to annihilate our future and deny wholeness – which

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<sup>37</sup> Mk. 10:45 NRSV.

<sup>38</sup> Jn. 10:18 NRSV.

<sup>39</sup> Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 92.

<sup>40</sup> Here I am referring to the domination system which sustains itself by selfish interests of those in esteemed positions and materialistic rewards for those institutions fostering personal benefit and gains.

are destructive of love and generate division.”<sup>41</sup> Put another way, people who do not understand what struggle really is may only see our situation superficially. Their voices are the voices of those who see themselves as “dictators” of life and for what others should follow. Their love is conditional and insincere, and their words of love are only “lip service” and not real.

Baker-Fletcher echoes part of what takes place in the immigrant experience and reality among the Samoans today. But it is not the whole story. There are Samoan Christians in our capacities that are working towards a new reality for the Samoans. We see this in the calling of Samoan educators and their efforts to address social and political issues and to educate the Samoan community about the negative impact they represent. The constant effort of the *faiifeau* to illuminate, enrich, and explain an understanding of God that is fitting, credible, and morally sufficient for Samoan Christians. This is an act of love.

*Alofa* is the possible force to overcome the evil forces. Yet this *alofa* must be freely given. Jesus freely gave his life for the life of all human beings. The only way to make the love real is to put a “human face” on it. *Alofa* is the freedom for communication, for communion, and for action. What is a Samoan Christian in his or her entirety? Elder Dr. Mailo once said, “It is a Samoan who lives a life of commitment to effective action and brings deeper meaning and penetration into God’s endless love as the source of all things and as a power that carries us along with it. That is the power of true love; love that is committed to the needs of the Samoan people who are struggling to

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<sup>41</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher and Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher, My Sister, My Brother: Womanist and Xodus God-Talk (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 2.



make sense of their lives in the United States.”<sup>42</sup>

Spirituality is Action of High Regard for Human Values—*Amio Fa’aaloalo*

Every action that has to do with life perfection falls under the category of spirituality. The people of God live according to the Spirit who is freedom and love because the Spirit is life in freedom. The presence of the Spirit sets the people of faith in motion, empowers people’s action, and endorses congregational dialogue. Gutierrez argues, “If theological reflection does not vitalize the action of the Christian community in the world” then it does not lead the church to justice and “will have been of little value.”<sup>43</sup> Theological discussion is meaningless when it does not go together with action. Action speaks louder than words.

Effective action penetrates through barriers of all levels of oppression. Action is not only an occasion to commune with those in need but to communion with God. Jesus said in one of his parables, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”<sup>44</sup> What Jesus implies is that there is a reciprocal relationship that proves to be a privileged means of grasping the deeper meaning of a church community. It is important not to isolate these reciprocal relationships, love and action, because only when they are unified is it possible to grasp what is precious to each of them.

Jesus has a brilliant point here. Any achievement that is righteously reckoned as “Christian” has to do with obeying the commands of Christ—when you do to “one of the

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<sup>42</sup> Farewell sermon after the completion of his term as Conference Chairman of the Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa, Southern California Conference, May 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 174.

<sup>44</sup> Matt. 25:40 NRSV.

least,” you have done it “to me.” Helping those who struggle economically or politically is action done in the name of the Lord. These are actions of obedience which have regard and respect for human values. The success of a Christian life, according to Niebuhr, is “in obedience to the laws of Christ, and in pursuit of perfection wholly distinct from the aims that men seek in politics and economics, and sciences.”<sup>45</sup> Put another way, human perfection cannot be accomplished without obedience to God’s instructions.

In the context of the Samoan church, creative action is giving direction and support for those Samoans living on welfare benefits and for those without sufficient education.<sup>46</sup> It is only within this context that the Samoan church and faith can work together for a new humanity and a new society. Any necessary action taken by the Samoan church must be in communion with God and oriented to the new creation of humanity. The image of the Samoan church as “sacrament” means that the church exists as both means and sign of God’s free activity in the liberating history of the Samoans.<sup>47</sup>

These six liberating theological principles of spirituality together with Fa’a-Samoan values can help Samoans make sense of their spirituality. A strong Samoan spirituality can help formulate influential cognitive perceptions about life and move the Samoans to take action. It can also help those Samoans who are unable to persevere through struggles because they are not grounded in the Spirit of God who loves us.

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<sup>45</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper Row, 1951), 56.

<sup>46</sup> The majority of my participants are welfare recipients, unemployed, and some are without proper education. Creative action is linked directly to human participation in the transformation of the Samoan society and history.

<sup>47</sup> The term “sacrament” refers to the visible manifestation of God’s kingdom in the world. This is to argue that the Samoan church does not exist for itself but for others: by existing for others, the Samoan church embodies the salvific activity of God in the world. The Samoan church is a sacrament, a visible sign of God’s encounter with history. This is what makes the Samoan immigrant history meaningful because it tells of what God has done for the lives of the Samoans and for the liberation from social and political injustices.

Creative thinking and not giving in to pain by employing our own physical well-being can contribute to the survival and liberation of Samoan immigrants and community in the long run. It is good to teach our Samoan people to be strong by word and example by teaching and empowering them that true strength is not giving in to the pain of ignorance but seeking the creative inner-voice of God for spiritual empowerment.

### Fa'a-Samoa Spirituality of Empowerment

Our dialogue with Gutierrez has helped us formulate new thoughts to enrich and empower Fa'a-Samoa theology of spirituality. The Fa'a-Samoa's most major achievement is the ability to convince a Samoan individual to incorporate within him/her the meaning of society. In other words, it is the "spirit of a people." Fa'a-Samoa deals with the form of Christian action, such as how to live in a non-Samoan context, how to cross Samoan generational barriers, and how to achieve recognition and maintain contact with other communities or parts of communities. Fa'a-Samoa from the beginning has never been an individual commodity. It has always been a communal spirit interweaving in faith and action in liberating the goodness of society.

Fa'a-Samoa is not just an open-ended way of life. Rather, it is a plan for living that is always in the process of formation and adjustment. It is a code of conduct for all Samoan action, for survival, and for success in life. As I have observed it, Fa'a-Samoa is constantly adjusting according to the needs and growth of experience. Fa'a-Samoa is a set norm for behaviors by providing meaning and values to the essence of Samoan culture; it also provides countless details associated with the various demands of life.

In a similar manner, American social communities deal with their surrounding by

means of norms, standards, and various levels of technological knowledge and skill.

They adapt to their social environment by means of political guidelines, and many norms guiding the interaction between members of the community, many of which are the norms for communication. They have placed their trust and faith in a God who provides resources for survival, helps the heartbroken to heal and redeems the goodness of creation.

These same norms are fundamental for contextualizing Samoan spirituality and for constructing meaningful theologies for Samoan communities. This is how the Samoan Christians become accustomed and deal with the various demands of the American culture, by means of norms and philosophy. So when I speak of the contributions of Fa'a-Samoa to the empowerment of Samoan spirituality, I am therefore speaking not of things or events as such, but of ideas that Samoans had adopted and enhanced in order to survive in this context.

In the Samoan community, Fa'a-Samoa has become the most powerful motivation in the Samoan life. It never ceases to be challenged. There have been times when it has seemed to be a failure. Some of the criticisms and attacks on Fa'a-Samoa have been made in our days. Its motivational factors have never been fully realized. However, measured by its effects, Fa'a-Samoa has become the most influential force in the life of Samoa. Life here, almost year by year, has become closer through increasingly rapid means of communication and technology that has reduced the size of the world in time-distances and made Samoan families that were once far from one another next door neighbors—through means of email, voicemail, text messages, and cell phones. The immediate source of spiritual harmony which has brought Samoans into close personal

understanding of the dominant culture has long been the main stronghold of Samoan spirituality. That is the Samoan *ola fa'aleagaga*—a life lived under the total guidance of the Spirit.

*Ola fa'aleagaga*, at this point, refers to the practices that cultivate and strengthen Samoan Christian life. It is a reminder that being a Samoan Christian is more than a theory or the acquisition of certain information rather it is a practice, a Christian traditions speak of devotional life. *Ola fa'aleagaga* as spiritual empowerment refers to the core of our Samoan human existence and relation to God and others. It is against this background which the present Samoan Christian generation can afford to look backward and retell the history of Fa'a-Samoa from its beginning to our day.

I admit that it is vital to look back in history, and is especially important for the youth, in order to reevaluate and relive the memories and stories of Fa'a-Samoa. Memories and stories are about Samoans in particular times and places. They are about our *tuaa* (ancestors)—our biological spirits; our *laueleele* (lands)—our identity, and our *aganu'u* (culture)—our true self. To understand and appreciate these dynamics of our spiritual life, we have to align with the source of our being-ness, that is, Fa'a-Samoa. When this occurs, we experience purpose as a glowing force which we sense as inspiration and express as destiny. This force, according to Brueggemann, is “concerned about creating a context, evoking a perception, forming a frame of reference which went beyond and did not depend on any particular version or nuance of any particular narrative.”<sup>48</sup>

Put another way, memories and stories imaginatively evoke innovative thoughts

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<sup>48</sup> Walter Brueggemann, The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 23.

and hopeful ideas full of life in the Samoan listener. These memories and stories are about the past coming alive in the moment of hearing it. They are called *tofa ma le fa'autaga* or Samoan wisdom, a very practical or profound wisdom. This wisdom conveys the primitive message and meaning of life that is truly liberating and hidden in the stories of Fa'a-Samoa crucial for spiritual empowerment.

Fa'a-Samoa as spiritual empowerment requires the commitment of all Samoans. We live in a fast-paced changing America, in the information age. Elder Dr. Mailo believes that we do not have to do it all. Many Samoans are more actively engaged in community and economic development, some in political debate and the educational professions; others are serving in the military.<sup>49</sup> This is important because racial and ethnic discrimination is a problem affecting both men and women of color in our society. While new guidelines and reformed immigration laws are changing at an individual and communal level, new visions cannot be fully realized unless socioeconomic practices in the workplace change and improve.

This theological discussion gave birth to significant descriptions of a new theological paradigm: a new understanding of human life, a new interpretation of Christianity, and a new form of theological consideration. The whole dialogue has directed our attention to a very different way of experiencing and interpreting both human existence and the Samoan Christian faith. To put the matter briefly, it has opened our minds to the reality that is necessary for revitalizing self, friends, family, and community. For the Samoans, it has opened a new Samoan image in Christ that helps sustain individuals and community.

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<sup>49</sup> Discussion with author, 23 Aug. 2006.

Tagata Fou ia Keriso – A New Samoan Image in Christ

The new Samoan image “in Christ” is fundamental to the enriching of mind and soul. It is the image founded on the principles and values of being in Christ. Being in Christ implies moving beyond our own selfish needs and onto Christ’s gracious initiative to involve us in the redemption of the world. John Calvin says, “If being in the image of Christ means life in communal and reciprocal, helpful relations with others, self-giving and hospitality, then faith and love is the new way to be human with and for others completely embodied in Jesus Christ and empowered in us by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>50</sup> Calvin reminds us that if being in the image of Christ means living by the love of God, and if such a relationship with God is broken by sins of self-glorification, then faith is the simple trust in the love of God extended to us by Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit.

What Calvin says about love and faith is the focus of theological discussion between Gutierrez and Fa’a-Samoa. Faith and love are wonderful biblical images of the Spirit. Faith carries us beyond our normal paths in life; love lifts us up when life gets too tough for us to uphold our pathway of life. Within that capacity, Samoan spirituality brings us into the new realm of friendship and justice with the “others” from whom we have long been alienated; from whom society shows less care with minimum health care and unemployment; people whom the government has ignored due to the prioritizing of the war in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan; and people whom the church has left behind and untouched by its outreach mission. Elder Dr. Mailo believes that these are the real

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<sup>50</sup> John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. Tony Lane and Hilary Osborne (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986). Calvin view faith as “a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”

life issues which Samoan spirituality is talking about. Being in the image of Christ, this is the struggle in which we must fight in order to show the true meaning and identity of Christ in which we are embodied.<sup>51</sup>

With faith and love, hope is also significant. According to Daniel Migliore, “hope is the new freedom toward God’s future in which we live in the expectation of the fulfillment of the gracious promise of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>52</sup> Within any community of immigrants, there is a high tension of hope for the future. People anticipate what the future may look like on their own terms. They have great imagination to envision a more organized society. In order for them to fulfill this dream, they exercise the power of Christ’s love and faith in God. Hope is not an illusion in itself. It is living and acting in a way that expresses confidence in God as Lord of the past and the present but also of the future.

My point here is that faith, love, and hope are ways of living into the image of Christ realized in our selfless attempt to help others. They are important gifts and practices of a new relationship with Christ, a new way of being a Samoan in solidarity with others that is grounded and nurtured in the forever love of God in Christ. For Paul, it is “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit”<sup>53</sup> which is the ground of our being as new image of Christ in the world. Susanne Johnson says, “In being conformed to Christ, we will be led through radical breaks,

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<sup>51</sup> Discussion with author, 23 Aug. 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2 ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 162.

<sup>53</sup> 2 Cor. 13:13 NRSV.



deaths, and rebirths, painful wrenching and surprising breakthroughs.”<sup>54</sup> Put another way, becoming a transformed Samoan is the only way to become a true Samoan Christian, and authentically shape a new Samoan spirituality.

Tagata Fou i le Agaga – Major Characteristics of a New Samoan Spirituality

Every new personality or *tagata fou* (self) has certain fundamental characteristics visible in his or her life. Since personality is a fundamental quality that always influences an individual’s behavior, it is an important piece of the theological discussion and spiritual explanation of that behavior—the “what” of personality or *tagata fou*.

The basic ecology of Samoan personality change is context—the *aiga*, *nu’u*, *ekalesia* (church), workplace, school, etc. The shaping of a Samoan personality, for example, may begin in the *aiga*, from mother to daughter on a plantation, from father to son on a fishing trip, in the *nu’u*, in the *ekalesia*, or on a vacation. These are the moments that feed knowledge in our souls and better our attitudes, which require the gifts of wisdom that an entire family or community of individuals can offer. Within our contexts are the hidden forces generating spiritual impulses for positive transformation of our personality. A changed personality holds it together by a desire for and commitment to greater wisdom and spiritual perfection within the body of the community. These are excellent qualities of spirituality that will help enrich Samoan spirituality.

Spirituality of happiness—*fiafia*. Everyone wants to be happy. In Fa’a-Samoa, *fiafia*<sup>55</sup> spirituality is the epitome of everything in life. This is the spirituality that drives

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<sup>54</sup> Susanne Johnson, Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 117.

everything from our daily routines to the growth of civilization. Spiritual practices are so rewarding because they make us happier and ultimately open the door to happiness. It is a type of happiness that is much more profound and satisfying than any of our usual short-lived pleasures. *Ola fa'aleagaga o le fiafia* or spirituality of happiness means reducing longing for those things that do not bring true happiness and redirecting desires to those that do.

I am reminded here of my conversation with my brother, Michael Niutoa. He said that although everyone wants happiness, some people suffer from mistaken ideas about what brings it.<sup>56</sup> His point implies that once one decides on what he thinks will make him happy, whether it is fame or health, he tends to become attached to them. To know happiness as not short-lived, he needs to change his motivation and desires to what brings him joy.

My brother and I had this discussion while at the hospital for our brother-in-law's operation. The doctors had just finished operating on him, and both of his lower extremities were amputated. For many years he had held high hopes that he would be okay. Just before he was taken into the operating room, he said, *e le umi* (it will be quick). My brother-in-law had high hopes that it would be a speedy operation. It was that hope that kept him happy and empowered him to go through the operation. My brother was right - some people tragically suffer from the idea about what happiness can bring.

Spirituality of love—*agalelei i tagata*. Personality is ruled by emotions. The

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<sup>55</sup> The Samoan concept of *fiafia* means many things: a time of wide smile and hearty laughter, vibrant dance performances, energetic feasting, respect for their ancestors and rejoice in their unique Fa'a-Samoa culture are just a few of the events that marks Samoan *fiafia*.

<sup>56</sup> Conversation with author, 18 April 2006.

feelings we repeatedly invite into our minds eventually seduce and dominate our minds. Then these emotions color our perceptions, mold our motives, and direct our lives. What we feel within ourselves we find reflected in our world. If we feel angry, we look out on a hostile world; if afraid, we find threats everywhere. But when love fills our minds, we see a world that yearns to love and be loved. *Alofa* in Fa'a-Samoa is love that reaches out to our *tuaoi* (neighbors). When a child is sent by your *tuaoi* for a cup of sugar for their tea, he or she returned with something. The Samoans share what they have with their neighbors. It is the Fa'a-Samoan way of *alofa i tagata*, be kind to and love everyone.

The day after my brother-in-law's operation, my sister was very depressed. Watching her husband laying helplessly in bed, she was overwhelmed with sadness. On top of that, her husband's cardiovascular system began to deteriorate; he had a bradyarrhythmia (slow heart rate). His kidneys failed. Feelings of frustration and anxiety clouded over my sister's mind. Her depressing emotions controlled her outlook and she was speechless most of the time. Every one of us in and around the room appeared to be strangers to her. It looked like the whole world was against her. Yet we were there to support her physically, mentally, and spiritually. It was our support of love and care that helped her realize that we are with her in her time of sadness. That is spirituality of love.

Spirituality of generosity and service—*tautua matavela*. Much of what Samoans do each day is already *tautua matavela*, generous service. Whether it is cooking, cleaning, or dropping off the kids at school, a lot of it is for the benefit of other people. Whether we do it as service or work is up to us. If we do it as a way of helping people, it is *tautua agalelei* or generous service. Perhaps our help will allow others to get their

work done more easily. With continuous practice, the reward of helping becomes more and more obvious. As it does, you may wish to see more and more activities from the perspective of service until it becomes a natural way of life.

My presence at my brother-in-law's operation was a generous service. I dedicated a week of my life to be at my sister's side, giving her emotional and spiritual support while waiting on her husband's recovery. The more I saw my support as helpful to her, the more I wanted to spend time with my sister and her husband. Committing to a period of *tautua matavela* or generous service does not necessarily mean making enormous changes in my life. I don't have to quit studying or forget my wife and children in order to give my sister spiritual support. I don't have to change my daily routine in order to be by her side. I'm just happy that each day I spent with my sister and her family becomes a source of satisfaction, and each moment of seeing my brother-in-law responding is an opportunity for learning. This service of commitment carries me one step closer to realizing that my true nature is the same as hers.

Spirituality of ethical living—*ola amiolelei*. The most important question here is: How do we live wisely and well? In Fa'a-Samoa, someone who is *amiolelei* or ethical persons recognize their mistakes as simply mistakes. They heal the past and themselves by correcting their errors, forgiving themselves, and learning as much as they can from the process. This is apparent in the Fa'a-Samoa culture of *ifoga* (reconciliation). In this way they gradually become free of the past, their minds cease to be junkyards of painful memories and guilty secrets, and they come fresh and clean to each new moment of experience. These words of the Dalai Lama will help illustrate my point,

“We are visitors on this planet. We are here for ninety, a hundred years at

the very most. During that period we must try to do something good, something useful with our lives. Try to be at peace with yourself and help others share that peace. If you contribute to others' happiness, you will find the true goal, the meaning of life."<sup>57</sup>

I learned a lot and also received several rewards while praying and supporting my sister. My brother, Michael, and I have not spoken to each other for a very long time. Our being there at the hospital to support our sister provided the opportunity to mend our differences. My brother became my teacher, showing me where I was being careless or unethical. In the same way, I became my brother's teacher. We love each other. The result is that I no longer feel burdened from not speaking to him. I now feel comfortable when calling him for something I may need while in school. Ethical living is essentially important for spiritual nurture. In Fa'a-Samoa, *amio tausa'afia* or ethical living is not idle but dynamic. A Samoan is regarded by his/her elders as *amio tausa'afia* when he/she live his/her life in light of *usita'i* (obedience) and respect for others and God.

Spirituality of self-awareness—tofa ma le fa'autaga.<sup>58</sup> Everything we experience

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<sup>57</sup> Dalai Lama, *Universal Responsibility and the Good Heart* (Dharmasala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1980). See also *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus* (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 1996).

<sup>58</sup> In the case of Fa'a-Samoa, to look beyond the narrow focus of the governance perspective, we can begin by examining the work of selected Samoan theologians, scholars, and philosophers who have analyzed various aspects of Samoan culture, especially the *tofa ma le fa'autaga*. However, although much has been written about the Fa'a-Samoa and fa'amatai (chiefly system), most of it has had an institutional, systemic, or procedural focus. Relatively little has been written about the principles that underpin the *tofa ma le fa'autaga* or decision-making system. Important concepts such as *pule* (authority, power); *soalaupule* (joint decision making); *'autasi* (consensus); *alofa* (love, compassion, care); *fa'aaloalo* (respect); *mamalu* (dignity); *fa'autaga*, *tofa*, and *moe* (all refer to wisdom), and many others, have not been defined extensively, and yet they constitute the basis of indigenous Samoan institutions. It is therefore necessary to carry out much more work, in collaboration with communities, in the area of Samoan traditional and political thought, philosophy, and ethics, not with the intent of promoting an idealized version of the fa'asamoa but with the aim of rethinking contemporary political and socioeconomic arrangements to enhance *tofa ma le fa'autaga*. If Samoans continue to invoke Fa'a-Samoa without defining more clearly what they are invoking and for what purpose, Fa'a-Samoa will continue to be *faigata* (difficult and ambiguous) and *fa'alavelave* (a necessary burden). When meanings are clearly established, it should be possible to put a finger on the pulse of their transformation and thereby determine the course and

comes to us shaped by our minds. Yet our natural minds have minds of their own. What we see is selected by our *manaoga* (desires), painted by our *lagona* (emotions), and divided by our rootless attention. What we see outside us reflects what is inside us. As a result, we do not see ourselves or the world clearly or accurately. What we get from each moment depends on the attention we give it. The quality of our experience reflects the quality of our awareness. We live semiconsciously because our awareness is clouded and our spiritual vision asleep.

My time spent with my sister taught me that mindfulness heals. Many things that my brother and I had disagreed upon do spring from unconscious responses. I had recognized a crucial example of what psychologists now call “deautomatization,” the possibility of breaking automatic habits by bringing awareness to them.<sup>59</sup> I see this as a spirituality of healing-power of awareness reflected in Gutierrez’ theology of liberation. In moments of *tofa ma le fa’autaga* or clear awareness, the oppressed will have a choice of how to respond. A thorough *tofa ma le fa’autaga* or clear awareness automatically gives persons stimulus to break away from lifeless opportunities. Each moment of mindfulness weakens the chains of oppression and brings the people closer to liberation.

Life here in the United States is not always easy, but it can be delightful. How to manage the difficulties and taste the goodness is a central challenge of life and goal of any spiritual practice. The difficulties are many. Even the most fortunate of us suffers times of sorrow and sickness, disappointment and despair. All of us go through fear and

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direction of change. See also Moreli J. Niutoa, “Bible: A Canonical Model for Youth Religious Education in My Samoan Church,” in *Multicultural Models for Religious Education*, ed. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier (Atlanta: SPCK/Third World Literature, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> David M. Wulff, *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 502. The concept of “deautomatization” was developed earlier by Merton Gill and Margaret Brenman (1959) with their students of hypnosis.

frustration, sadness and depression. I know that my sister did. Sooner or later, we all watch loved ones die and we eventually die ourselves. So how do we sing a new song in a different land? There is a rhythm to spiritual life, and each of us needs to use the gifts of a new person to sing in a foreign land. These gifts are equipped with the right spiritual “notes” of awareness, generous service, living ethical life, happiness, and love.

With these qualities of a new personality, we can sing a new song in a foreign land; a song of remembrance and celebration of past experiences now transformed in a new way. We sing a song of thanksgiving to the Lord who was present and is still present among us today. This song is our theology—a way to think of the love of God and what God has done for us. To maintain and nurture this song to last its life-giving meaning forever we find appropriate embodiment for God. This embodiment is Fa’a-Samoa. Fa’a-Samoa is neither bad nor opposed to the will of God. Rather it is a way of expressing and revealing the love and purpose of God for Samoans. Powell says, it “is a fit vehicle for God used by God and of revealing God and being united with God.”<sup>60</sup>

How can the experience of Gutierrez in his relationship with the people be of value to our local Samoan context? It is valuable because his experience has worked under particular circumstances in Latin America. In our Samoan experience we see the richness of the gospel in the same way through the prism of Fa’a-Samoa that helps us confess the one God in many cultures, the spiritual well that we must drink from.

### We Drink from Our Own Wells: A Fa’a-Samoan Perspective

Fa’a-Samoan life cultivates openness for God’s reign and also teaches and

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<sup>60</sup> Samuel Powell, Theology of Christian Spirituality, 28.

proclaims it. In this openness and proclamation a Samoan community builds itself up as a community of faith. The Samoan community is also a place where we celebrate and commemorate the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The support of the Samoan community is essential for the life experience of Samoans in the United States. It is only in community that we can travel together and overcome the steep valleys of economic struggle and political injustice in our society.

The experience of Samoan solidarity can give rise to a yearning for community. There is solitude with oneself and with God that, however difficult it may be to endure at difficult times is a requirement for an authentic Samoan faith community. God does not want us to get lost in the fog of economic and political struggle, but to pass safely through it, in order to live happily in the new land—the land of “milk and honey,” America. Our journey together through the times of financial and economic difficulties will only create a strong Samoan community—*aiga* and *ekalesia*—as our wells to draw strength from during bad times.

Our Fa’a-Samoan wells are overflowing with people of God-given talents and gifts that can help stabilize and mobilize the Samoan community. Fa’a-Samoa is a great asset in community building. Though we continue to face challenging life-issues in our families and churches, we still have our wells—*aiga* and *ekalesia*. We have our Fa’a-Samoa as a “textbook” to teach us how to draw out water from the wells. We have our elders who can tell us and interpret life-stories of old Samoa so we can have a sense of what life may have been like for our ancestors. Having access to the past not only brings history alive in our memories but also reminds us that we are not alone in our journey to the future. We were always with our ancestors in the spirit.



The Samoan experience and life in the United States often takes an unexpected turn: a way through a painful experience of profound solitude or loneliness. This experience of the solitude of the “desert” is a profound dimension of the encounter with God. Our way through this experience is the support and guidance of the Holy Spirit. In loneliness the Spirit speaks to us, “Be still, and know that I am God.”<sup>61</sup> Being all alone with God, who empowers us with the gift of happiness in the innermost depths of our soul, is an awesome experience. This overwhelming feeling can only be experienced through a community in solidarity with the God of human hopes and dreams.

Samoan spirituality is a journey in freedom with the Holy Spirit of God, constantly searching for ways to enrich and sustain faithful relationships with God and others. This journey has its starting point in an encounter with God at our wells—the Fa’a-Samoa. Such an encounter is a profound spiritual experience that gives birth to and gives meaning to the freedom of which I have been speaking throughout this study. The encounter itself derives from the Holy Spirit’s initiative. Samoan spirituality and experience, then, stands at the beginning of a Samoan churches spiritual journey, where we must return and draw from the living-water to feed our souls.

Ecclesiastically, this Samoan community wells continues to nurture the religious experience and practice of the Samoan Christian church. On the other hand, it continues to birth and influence new characteristics of a new Samoan spirituality.

#### Ecclesiastical Practice of Samoan Spirituality in the Samoan Church

Similar to other Christian churches, the Samoan Christian church has significant

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<sup>61</sup> Ps. 46:10, NRSV.

ecclesiastical practices for spirituality. The Samoan Christian life is the life of grace, and its growth depends upon grace freely received and responded to. Samoan Christians must therefore give particular attention to the normal means of grace, which are the sacraments. So we shall satisfy ourselves with drawing attention to such facts as seem most important, showing the relationship of the sacraments to the needs of Samoan Christians.

To arrive at the core of the Samoan Christian lifeway, it is important that we should look at some of the sacramental practices which nurture the Samoan Christian faith. These practices are fundamentally geared toward obedience to the revealed will of God; an effort on the part of Samoan Christians, created in the image of God, to emulate and humbly follow the will of the living God.

On the other hand, these practices emerged out of Gutierrez's theological bearing of solidarity with the struggle people. From an ecclesiological point of view, they are especially therapeutic and seem to be fundamental to the function of the Fa'a-Samoa as agency of spiritual renewal. Among the common theological significance of these practices were an emphasis on the new birth, strength of personal religious experience, a focus on personal piety, holiness, discipline, and emphasis on Scripture. The practicing of these life-giving sacraments for the nurturing of Samoan spirituality is requisite for becoming a faithful Samoan Christian.

#### *Papatisoga – Baptism*

*Papatisoga* is the sacrament of birth into the family of Christ. By baptism we are born again into the spiritual body of Christ. The unity with Christ is his body, the church. We are therefore “in Christ” through faith, led by the Spirit of God; no longer under our

own will but the will of God. Jurgen Moltmann nicely put it, we are “set apart and destined not for [ourselves] but for the service of the kingdom of God. As the sanctified [we] therefore sanctified the world.”<sup>62</sup> We are set apart for God’s purpose in this world; our set apart is the fulfillment and completion of the union with Christ already present in *papatisoga*, and is the highest manifestation of that union.

The first effect of *papatisoga* is the death of the “old” self, the fallen soul. The waters of *papatisoga* wash away all sin, and thus potentially buried the old-self and deliver the new-self from the power of sin. Notice here that apostle Paul says that our old self is crucified “with him.”<sup>63</sup> Being crucified means that our old self has to be kept on the cross if it is completely to die to sin, and that is the business of the ascetic life: to unite the soul by will and desire to Jesus crucified, that sin may be actually die in it. The entail of sin with which we are born is broken by *papatisoga*, so that we are no longer enslaved to bondage of sin; but its effects remain in sinful inclinations which “the sacrament gives us grace to keep nailed to the cross enabling us to fight temptation in the power of Christ.”<sup>64</sup>

In the Samoan church, there are three important dispositions of *papatisoga*. The first one is *fa’atuatua* (faith). By faith we accept the love of God offered to us, and without it the life in grace is impossible. The Samoan Christian life depends on a living and growing *fa’atuatua* in Christ with whom we are united.

Second, is *fa’amoemoe* (hope). *Fa’amoemoe* is the devoted and obedient of the

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<sup>62</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, The Church in the Power of the Spirit (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 354.

<sup>63</sup> Rom. 6:3-4, NRSV.

<sup>64</sup> Frederic Percy Harton, The Elements of the Spiritual Life: A Study in Ascetical Theology (London: SPCK, 1932), 192.

self and life to God, in whom we trusts. Without *fa'amoemoe* our Christian virtues has no values. *Fa'amoemoe* is one of the abiding Samoan virtues of Christian faith in God. The language of *fa'amoemoe* belongs primarily to Paul; also it is central to the life and thought of the New Testament writers.

And third is *salamo* (repentance). *Salamo* is not merely the change of attitude or behaviors but the complete change of mind in regard to sin which marks the difference between the “new” and the “old.” It involves feeling guilty and remorseful over wrongdoing as well as taking steps to resolve matters or to reconcile with the victim. The process of *salamo* is similar to that of the *ifoga* (as discussed in chapter six).

These important dispositions are the root virtues of Samoan Christian life. None of them is ever outgrown in the Samoan spiritual lifeway, but rather deepen with the growth of the soul; for just as *papatisoga* is the fundamental sacrament upon which all the others rest, so the dispositions which are necessary to the fruition of that sacrament are fundamental to the whole Samoan spiritual lifeway.

#### *Fa'amanatuga*<sup>65</sup> – Holy Communion

As their belief in the symbolism of Fa'a-Samoa as sacrament for God's message to the Samoans, Jesus Christ is present in the *fa'amanatuga* for two purposes— communion and sacrifice. *Fa'amanatuga* is not merely a celebration of the salvific act of God through Jesus Christ but a celebration of the eternal presence of Christ within our midst. *Fa'amanatuga* is the most perfect act of worship possible to Samoan Christians.

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<sup>65</sup> It means “to remember,” from a Samoan term *fa'amanatu* or “to remind you of” something important that had occurred earlier or in the past. The 'ava ceremony, for example, is a *fa'amanatu* to the Samoans of the first ceremonial event of resurrection – the death of Pava's son who the god Tagaloa brought back into life. See chapter two for a detail discussion of this Samoan ceremonial event.

*Fa'amanatuga* is impossible without the sacrifice. Jesus Christ is present in the sacrament as “the Lamb that is slain,” and the Samoans in receiving him receives the “body” broken and the “blood” poured out for us all. Through this perfect act we are united to Christ in the most possible and complete way. *Fa'amanatuga* is the greatest gift which we receive on earth; its end is not the benefit of us, but the worship of God.

In *fa'amanatuga* the Lord gives himself to be our spiritual food, “my flesh,” he says, “is true food and my blood is true drink.”<sup>66</sup> It is true that in this sacrament we receive an increase of ordinary grace, but the sacrament itself is more than these, being nothing less than Christ himself. In receiving his body and blood we possess the whole Christ, his very soul and divinity. We can realize that we have received a tremendous gift, we have received Jesus—his love and virtues and mind are ours. *Fa'amanatuga* is the center of the Samoan Christian life because in it the soul receives Christ. Receiving Christ is very much depends upon the dispositions of the individual Samoan, for if the soul be full of self there is little room for Christ. It is important that Samoans must consider what dispositions Christ would find in the soul to whom he comes.

The first disposition is the preparation of the *loto* (soul). Participating in *fa'amanatuga* requires *fa'atuatua*. The greatness of the virtue will vary in different *loto*, but the virtue itself must be present, otherwise there is no contact between the soul and God, and any real participation in Christ is impossible. The *loto* should have a loving desire for Christ. This is the spirit of devotion, varies according to the spirituality of the individual. For some people it is a deep thirst for God; for others it is no more than a quiet wish for God. The Samoans should desire God and fixing the whole of one's love

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<sup>66</sup> John 6:55, NRSV.

and attention upon God.

The second disposition is *mafutaga* (communion). There are two persons in this *mafutaga*—Christ and myself. We receive Christ in *fa'amanatuga* in order that we may give ourselves to him; our reception of the sacrament should never be merely self-seeking. We need Christ more than what we can say, and we need much from him. In full capacity Christ gives us himself. The completeness of Christ's gift of himself to us demands an equally complete giving of ourselves to him. With a prayer of generosity there must be in the heart at that moment the desire to give him the most complete offering of self of which we are capable. The one thing needful is that we open our hearts wide to Christ.

And the third disposition is *fa'afetai* (thanksgiving). The primary dispositions after *fa'amanatuga* are praise to God for himself and *fa'afetai* to God for his gift of salvation. The time after *fa'amanatuga* is an exceedingly important one, when we are very near to our Lord and may rightly speak to him freely of all that is nearest to our heart. But we should not be in a hurry to talk about things—it is Christ himself with whom we should be occupied, not ourselves and our needs.

The continuation of *fa'amanatuga* and its dispositions is carried on through a Sunday buffet-meal for all congregants, the *to'ana'i* (a meal for all people). Everyone (and guests) are invited and are welcome to partake in this Samoan eating culture and share with one another their faith experience. According to Elder Dr. Ioane Mailo, this Sunday buffet-meal is a reflective approach to the Samoan spiritual life.<sup>67</sup> It is a moment of spiritual nurturing and family-church bonding and listening to the needs of those we

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<sup>67</sup> Phone conversation with author, 24 Sep. 2006.

are part of in the family of Christ. Jean Stairs says, it is moment of “reviewing with others the ways we have presented Jesus, and clarifying our understanding of living as revealed in scripture.”<sup>68</sup>

### *Soifua Auauna – Discipleship*

The *soifua auauna* of a Samoan is the most important of all Samoan Christian attitude or lifeway. *Soifua auauna* or “discipleship” implies both the physical and spiritual aspects of Samoan service. *Soifua* originates from the Samoan way of life; it literally means life in its totality. It is a respectful term to address someone or to realize the importance of another person. When addressing a pastor, for example, *Malo le soifua manuia i lau susuga a le faifeau* (“Good health and tidings to you pastor”). *Auauna* means “servant” or to “to be humble” in terms of relationship with the other person. But it is more than just to be humble or serving those you served. It is about believing and living in the ideas and principles of a virtuous life in relationship with others.

Theologically, it is more than just a relationship between God and us. It is how we live as a faithful people of God in relation to the world, integrating our faith in ways that are accessible to others. We do this in communion and solidarity with God and one another, and participating fully in the life of the Samoan church. All of these dynamics are bound together by the Samoan word *auaunaga* or “participation.”

*Auaunaga* is a key word in understanding Samoan spirituality. Christian educators and writers embrace participation as a part of our obligation to God.<sup>69</sup> In

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<sup>68</sup> Jean Stairs, Listening for the Soul: Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 48.

<sup>69</sup> For a detail discussion of participation, see Susanne Johnson, Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 43-103.

Samoa, it is not just partaking in the physical but also in the spiritual nature of the individual Christian. Physical and spiritual characters of the individual cannot be separated from one another. These characteristics of *auaunaga* are significant to the Samoans. To engage in both is to receive spiritual discipline and partake in the entire lifeway of the Samoan church, worshipping together as a people of one faith united in Christ. Through partaking in both aspects of *auaunaga* to the Samoan church, we are drawn out of self-glorification and into glorifying and praising our Lord Jesus Christ.

The idea of *soifua auauna* or *auaunaga* affirms that everything exists cooperates already in the source of all life, or it would not exist at all. The Samoan Christians need to partake fully in the life of the Samoan church because God first *auauna* to us through Jesus Christ. Going to church is an important initial step. Yet it does not guarantee participation in the ministry of the Samoan church. Becoming a Samoan Christian is understood as a process of conversation and transformation.

In summary, while empowering Samoan souls to advance in the spiritual life, we must remember that *soifua auauna* must on no account be made cheap. Many Samoans often refrain from participating in the church not because of indifference, but because of reverence, and this reverence is a very important thing which must not be broken. It should, however, not be allowed to separate the Samoan life from its vibrant source, but rather lead to a deeper love and desire for Christ and a longing for greater holiness.

### Summary

Theology of Fa'a-Samoa brought up several significant points. Fa'a-Samoa is:  
(1) a legitimate relationship with God—a transformation of the self, (2) something to do



with the integration of all aspects of Samoan lifeway and experience, (3) becoming a Samoan in its fullest sense, (4) that frame of mind which breaks the Samoan person out of the isolated self, (5) a sense of relatedness to that which is beyond the self, and (6) centered on our awareness and experience of relationality—communion.

These important dimensions of Samoan spirituality provide a solid foundation and holistic perspective from which to address the critical issues of our times. This may include the revitalizing of education, religious work and culture, the honoring of women's wisdom, the restoration and celebration of hope in today's Samoan immigrants, and the promotion of community, social, political, educational, and ecological justice.

One very important concept in Samoan spirituality is solidarity. Our solidarity with God moves us to long for community. God first moved to be with us and therefore, incarnated Himself in Jesus. Jesus is the exemplar of the life that Samoan Christians are to live and respect. The Samoan Christian life is based on and follows not theoretical guidelines and ideas, but instead a particular life, a life of Jesus we are to embody.

Fa'a-Samoa and spirituality have a strong bond throughout Samoan life, and are mutually supporting. Fa'a-Samoa inspired by spiritual concepts have addressed Samoan's most profound needs and life's greatest mysteries: beliefs about death and an afterlife, the nature of the universe and humanity's place in it, and the moral and ethical codes that guide Samoan behavior. The theology and language of Fa'a-Samoa continue to express metaphysical ideas, spiritual feelings, or a longing for a bright future. They continue to express spiritual emotions and ideas, and serve as a potent symbol of the divine and sacred as it has done throughout the entire Samoan existence. Importantly, they serve in a liberating and energizing manner to move Samoans out of the realm of ordinary

perception into a state of awareness to the presence of God, their refuge in time of spiritual struggle.

The next chapter speaks about religious education for Fa'a-Samoa. It is an attempt to create a fitting pedagogy to teach Fa'a-Samoa as practice of Samoan spirituality; at the same time, it discusses the role of church and family in helping teach and maintain Fa'a-Samoa in the United States.

## CHAPTER 5

FA'A-SAMOA AS PEDAGOGY OF SAMOAN SPIRITUALITY: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION  
FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

The previous section discussed the theological exposition of Fa'a-Samoa and how it integrated Gutierrez's spirituality of solidarity to inform a theology of Samoan spirituality. This chapter speaks about religious education of Fa'a-Samoa. It is a religious education in process which involves the voices of Samoan participants, a communal conversation. My role as a religious educator in this process is to help people look at questions such as: What kind of framework is vital for Samoan spirituality in the United States? How would this framework be utilized? How do Fa'a-Samoa as practice help nurture Samoan spirituality? What theological and educational assumptions emerge from the discussion will help enhance Samoan religious and cultural values for spiritual growth? How important is Fa'a-Samoa, as practice, in the re-evaluation of spiritual formation?

Religious education of Fa'a-Samoa spirituality is the integration of religious and cultural values with biblical principles in an attempt to make-sense of what God is speaking to us through the gospel and culture. It is an interactive dialogue and through that dialogue transformation may occur. Religious education to Mary Boys is "the making accessible of the traditions to the community and...the intrinsic connection between traditions and transformation."<sup>1</sup> This connection helps reaffirm the significance of traditional themes and styles so people can make-sense of life. It will help provide healing and spiritual foundation for Samoans during "down times" in the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Boys, *Educating in Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989), 193.

### Making Fa'a-Samoa Accessible to Foster Spiritual Formation

Making traditions accessible to the community served as a constant reminder of who we are and just how important it is for us to relate the forces of life and identify with it through our own likeness. During the time when we were struggling to survive, it was our Fa'a-Samoa tradition that prevented us from committing total self-annihilation, and empowers us not to give in to our situation. The embracing of Fa'a-Samoa healed our spiritual formation and gave us some impression of the reality that it is important for the Samoans to look like and reflect the self-image of that culture.

In essence, the spiritual foundation for our Samoan existence revolved, and continues to revolve around the fundamental concepts of Fa'a-Samoa cultural-religious practice. *Ifoga* (act of reconciliation), for example, was the major practice in the healing process of the Samoan; and now it must be made available for the disillusioned Samoan as well. Religious education for Fa'a-Samoa should be the opening of the mind and heart to the traditions of faith that involves the whole person which had its origin in God who is able to transform one's life. That is the fundamental relationship between traditions and transformation. Robert Pazmino says, "Without such a linkage any discussion of conversion can remain just an intellectual exercise."<sup>2</sup> Pazmino implies that religious education is the sharing of faith stories and life experiences—information; the learning of Christian values and lifestyle—formation; and fashioning the change of people's lives, communities, and structures—transformation.<sup>3</sup> By interweaving the three together we

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<sup>2</sup> Robert W. Pazmino, Principles and Practices of Christian Education: An Evangelical Perspective (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

may regard this *tagata fou ia Keriso*—a new Samoan person in Christ.

The Samoan church has deep roots in its faith practices of the past. It has shared fully in the Fa'a-Samoa lifestyle and culture. It has incarnated the values of combined action in producing a result, and respect for authority which gave strength to Samoan lifeway. The Samoan church has had a natural attraction for Samoan values, and has enriched the Samoan community. These values are practiced and nurtured in the *aiga* and in the Samoan church.

It is not surprising that the Samoan church is in touch with the modern world that is producing so many life changes. These changes had placed a great impact on Samoan life. In our friendly discussion, the Reverend Suitulaga Faiai disclosed that “There is a big change of attitude in Samoan *aiga* in America today. That is a visible sign of change affecting family relationship because personal connection is no longer there.”<sup>4</sup> This implies that the lifeway of Samoan families had also been influenced by these challenges. Fortunately the church continues to uphold the good things in the old traditional Samoan life and also realize what is good in modern life. Our Fa'a-Samoa is our life combined with distinct roles and fundamental principles important for a vibrant life of the Samoan Christians and educational ministry.

Today, many Samoans in the church have not been schooled in the rudiments of the Fa'a-Samoa as previous generations were schooled. For this reason, the Samoan church has an important educational task, both for its members (catechesis) and for those outside the church (evangelism). Fa'a-Samoa is that aspect of the Samoan Christian life that have been recognized as normative and essential for our well-being as disciples of

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<sup>4</sup> Discussion with author, 16 Apr. 2006.

Jesus Christ so we can fit into Christian images that reflect who we really are—Samoan Christians.

Samoan religious education is a cultural activity with Samoans in time that purposely draws us to fellowship with God. This cultural activity is needed to effectively communicate the philosophy of religious education, to establish individual goals, to teach skills, and to develop the competencies upon which the religious education for spiritual growth and transformation is based. According to Thomas Groome, religious education should “intentionally attends to the activity of God in our present, to the Story of the Christian faith community and the Vision of God’s Kingdom which are already among us.”<sup>5</sup>

In this context, God’s activity already among us is a transforming experience. Transformation is a process of changing old ways of life into new. To borrow an analogy from St. Matthew’s, transforming is changing “old wineskins into new wineskins.”<sup>6</sup> This saying of Jesus implies that without transformation—which means creating a new heart and a new consciousness in people—humanity will lose the accumulated knowledge of God’s salvation history and activity. The activity of God, the Christian faith, and God’s kingdom are the Christian values to share so Samoans can contribute to the creation and transforming of new persons. The teaching of these values and faith experiences supplies a religious aspect to moral-ethical development of religious education for spiritual empowerment.

Taking to heart the lessons of Fa’a-Samoa religious and cultural practices and the

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Groome, Christian Religious Education (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 9:17, NRSV.

very formative influence which give shape to and sustain Samoan spirituality, it is time to look at the educational ministry of the Samoan Christian church. The goal is to develop a model for Fa'a-Samoa religious education, which intentionally and transformatively teaches and nurtures Samoan spirituality.

### The Educational Ministry of the Samoan Church

The educational ministry of the Samoan church invites and incorporates people into the life of the Christian community; engages in the acts by which the community responds to God. It helps the Samoan Christians to gain profound knowledge and confidence in God, and likewise, teach the community to put their trust in God. It reminds the Samoans not to forget the works of God and to follow Jesus's teachings.

God's goal for Samoan community is to be a redeemed people dwelling in a renewed environment, and enjoying the presence of God among us. Thus, the mission of the Samoan church is to be carried out primarily through the process of religious education, for we are to "go teach."<sup>7</sup> From this perspective, the very nature of the Samoan Christian church is clearly missiological for we are to "teach all nations." The content of this mission is incarnated and centered in Christ. For baptizing them indicates securing total submission to him as Savior. But the mission is not over at this point. The

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<sup>7</sup> This great commission of Jesus becomes the foundational basis and authority for the teaching of the Samoan church. As such, the commission now depends on Jesus' authority, not the Samoan church. No longer limiting the church ministry to Israel, but the Samoan church is to go out into the whole world with the gospel of the kingdom Jesus preached, making disciples of all nations. Becoming a disciple involves two steps: being baptized into the community of people who worship Jesus as the Son of God, an affirmation that leads them now to call God by a new name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and being trained in obedience to fulfill the will of the Father by living in accordance with the commandments as taught and interpreted by Jesus. Jesus' church will be an inclusive, ethical community of people with whom Jesus promises to abide till the end of time. See also James L. Mays, HarperCollins Bible Commentary, rev. ed. (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 900.

statement “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”<sup>8</sup> calls for a lifetime process of growing in discipleship, not merely “winning” souls. Paul says, every disciple is continually “pressing toward the mark.”<sup>9</sup> That “pressing toward the mark” is aiming toward spiritual transformation. The aim of Samoan religious education therefore, is learning God’s message, sharing God’s love, and living God’s word

### Key Principles Undergirding Practice of Religious Education for Spiritual Formation

When rethinking religious education for Samoan spirituality, at the same time, religious education for spiritual formation is essentially important. The spirituality of the Samoan Christians will continue to have meaning if participants rediscover Samoa’s rich spiritual heritage through worship, learning of Fa’a-Samoa, and fellowship. Spiritual formation is admirably evoked by Fa’a-Samoa in its heritage and tradition of faith.

The Samoan church religious education practice should not be the application of only the dominant American values. Rather it should be the applications of both Fa’a-Samoa and Christian values. Jurgen Moltmann says, it is only through this reversal of importance that this image of Jesus Christ is meaningful and “is related to the person and history of Jesus and thus radically transformed.”<sup>10</sup> What Moltmann implies is that both cultural values—Fa’a-Samoa and American—must be purposely serving one another. It is only in this way that we are able to see images of God unfolding in Fa’a-Samoa. This provides a new reason for them to uphold Fa’a-Samoa values dear to their own way of life, and learned to understand the value of God’s grace and forgiveness revealed in Jesus

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<sup>8</sup> Matt. 28:19-20, NRSV.

<sup>9</sup> Phil. 3:14, NRSV.

<sup>10</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 102.



Christ. Religious education of Samoan spirituality therefore, should help participants find time and space to discern direction, make covenants, and practice commitment. This suggestion was based on the discussion with the Samoan participants.

*O polokalama a le ekalesia e tatau ona fuafua mo le fa'afaileleina o le ola fa'atuatua o tagata lotu...*

Church programs should plan and focus on nurturing and empowering the faith of those who come to church....

*E lelei ia o aoga a le faifeau a matou. Ou te toaga lava i aoga Tusi Paia aua e fesoasoani tele i lo'u ola fa'atuatua. Afai e le mafai ona fesoasoani aoga a le ekalesia i le fa'atupuina o le fa'atuatua o le tagata lotu...ua maumau o tatou taimi e o ai i le lotu.*

Our pastor is really good in doing Bible study at our church. I always participate in Bible study to nurture my faith. If church education cannot help people to grow in faith...then I think it's just a waste of time for people to come to church.

*O le a'oa'oina o le Tusi Paia e tatau ona i ai se taimi avanoa o le tagata e mafaufau loloto ai i nei a'oa'oga. E mo'omia tele e le tagata taimi paganoa e mafuta atu ai i le Atua.*

The teaching of the Bible should allow time for people to discern and digest what is taught to them. People really need time on their own to reflect and fellowship with God.

*E sa'o lelei... E mana'omia e le tagata se taimi e saili ai i le Atua. O le saili i le Atua o le mafuta atu lea ina ia mafuta mai le Atua e ala i le Agaga. Ailoga e fia mafuta mai le Atua pe a le saili muamua atu le tagata ia te ia.*

Yes, it is...People really need time to seek God. Seeking God is fellowshiping with God so God may fellowship with us through the Spirit. I don't think God can fellowship with a person if the person does not first seek God.

*O le liliuina ao le tagata e taua ai le fa'alogoma ma ola i le Upu a le Atua. E leai se tagata e tupu i le fa'atuatua pe a lafoa'i le taua o le auai mai o le Agaga e fa'amalosia le mafuta atu ia te ia. O le fatu lena o le ola ua tupu i le fa'atuatua i le Alii o Iesu Keriso.<sup>11</sup>*

Hearing of the Word of God is necessary for spiritual transformation. Our faith cannot grow if we neglect the significant presence of the Holy Spirit within us. That is the heart of human life nurturing through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revealed in the Samoan participants' responses is the heartbeat of spiritual formation.

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<sup>11</sup> Fasimoli Tapuloa, Pouniu Laie, Talosaga Seumanutafa, Maselusi Soa, and Fiaaoga Moa, discussion with author, 23 Jan. 2005.

Religious education practice in the Samoan church should help the lives of Samoan Christians reach for deeper spiritual growth and meaning. Fa'a-Samoa teaching, the spiritual guidance, the liturgical experience, group encounter and sharing, and silent reflection not only balanced but interwoven through the religious education practice of Fa'a-Samoa. A thorough discussion and implementation of the teaching and suggestions will help sharpen the Samoan philosophy and in turn improve its religious education efforts and practices for spiritual development. It should be more inclusive and emphasis should be placed on the process of teaching and practice.

Judging from this theological and educational implication, God's self-revelation was conveyed in terms of the Fa'a-Samoa social and religious context. Understood in these terms, God's self-disclosure is strongly linked to the historical context of the Samoans. It has to do with the Word of God which can only be understood and appropriated as it becomes 'flesh' in a specific historical situation with its particular culture and all the political, social and economic factors present in it. Thus the educational ministry of the Samoan church is God's agent to re-create, re-value, and transform biblical cultural elements that are consistent with God's revelation and which may be adapted and used in the service of God's Kingdom on earth. This ministry may be considered "incarnational ministry."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> At the core of the "incarnational ministry" is God's love. God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ, he became "flesh," to walk among us, love us and teach us to follow him. Fundamental to incarnational ministry is the desire to engage Samoans in relationships. The ultimate goal is to encourage people on the foundational belief of God's Word and the life of discipleship that follows; care for people and point them to God who loves and cares about them. When Jesus commissioned his disciples to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19), he was calling them to incarnational ministry. He wanted them to make disciples in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and to give, through their presence, substance to the triune God who is invisible but real. And they did! In describing the first disciples, Justin Martyr said, "They were uneducated and of no ability in speaking. But by the power of God, they proclaimed to every race of men that they were sent by Christ to teach the Word of God to everyone." Two centuries later

Significant to the educational ministry of the Samoan church is an incarnational ministry—the embodiment of God-values and God-purposes. It attempts to personify the teachings of the gospel with values and forms that are applicable to Samoan Christian practices and morals; and move with the people in free solidarity and fellowship. But there are challenges involved. We must realize that incarnational ministry is often under criticism because of the cultural norms we employed to embody and communicate the gospel message.

As a result, other traditions of faith do not always agree with how the Samoan church labors its incarnational ministry. This might have happened because their spirituality depends more on their level of ministry development than on the faith tradition that they belong to. Therefore, the proper respond to this challenge is to develop a fitting religious education paradigm to help liberate us from our limiting cultural images of God. This is one logical intention for my integration of Fa'a-Samoa and Gutierrez's theological and educational view. Instead of viewing theology and education merely from the Samoan lens, conversing with Gutierrez's is another way to gain important theological and educational perspective for spiritual growth.

Nevertheless, perpetual fogs still exist in our “meaning-making” of God. God incarnates in Jesus and manifests Godself in a diversity of meanings and symbols. These meanings and symbols (world cultures) are our only sources of information that shapes our learning experience and how we understand God. To fully appreciate and make sense of the God who is working endlessly for our good and is consciously present

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(about 197 A.D.) Tertullian wrote: “We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you—cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market places, senate, forum—we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods. It seems like everyone in the early church was explosively involved in incarnational ministry.

among us we have to identify and define the symbols portraying God undergirding the Fa'a-Samoa. This is because the mindset of all Samoans has been formed by Fa'a-Samoa in which they have been brought up. Their theological and educational assumptions, their value system, the ways in which they think, and the degree of their openness or resistance to new ideas are mainly determined by their Samoan heritage and are filter through which they listen and assess.

It is important to see how we have been able to work together in formulating new theological and educational paradigms for Samoan spiritual nurture. With the Samoans now situated in the United States, the new setting has brought more cultural issues that have a different view on Samoan Christianity. New cultural concerns raised have become critical factors in their immigrant experience. Yet their identity as Samoan Christians depends entirely on how they respond to these cultural issues. Because of these cultural issues the Samoans must first understand how the God of the gospel message is incarnated in the biblical culture, and how we make sense of God incarnated in the Fa'a-Samoa and American culture as well.

To do this, we will look at the contexts—*aiga* and *ekalesia*—in which religious education for spiritual formation has been primarily taught. It is primarily in these contexts that Samoan faith is nurtured and fellowship with God is stressed. It is here that family solidarity and community awareness is experienced. This is what Samoan spirituality is about—helping us to find and understand God's purpose and will for us. Susanne Johnson argues that "Our spirituality establishes us in communion and solidarity with all that God creates and loves."<sup>13</sup> In a similar way, Samoan spirituality establishes

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<sup>13</sup> Susanne Johnson, Christian Spiritual Formation, 13.

us in solidarity with God through retelling the stories of faith in which grew out of our responses to the life of Jesus. This continues as we share and retell what God had done in our lives and for us in salvation history.

*Aiga and Ekalesia: Contexts of Religious Education for Samoan Spirituality*

Samoan spirituality is always nourished by a community of belief and practice in the midst of a particular culture. Samoans do not become spiritual social activists on their own. They are guided and nurtured in their efforts to live integrated spiritual lives by learning from the teachings, practices, and exemplars of Fa'a-Samoa. Most often, these Samoans are members of a historic faith tradition, sometimes representing one's faith traditions, sometimes another. The important thing is that their spirituality are each authentic expressions of them who have lived experience of God through the Spirit. They all agree on this point: align yourself with a community of belief and practice for the ongoing challenge and support it provides.

Religious education for Samoan spirituality must draw from the whole life of the Samoan church, not just from what happens in its educational norms—Sunday school, biblical studies, and the like. Samoan church life events such as the practice of *ifoga* (act of reconciliation), *papatisoga* (baptism), *Fa'amanatuga* (Holy Communion), or even *ola auauna* (discipleship) are all educative events in the Samoan church.<sup>14</sup> Through these events Samoan religious educators need to be attentive to all the ways in which the congregation educates by what it says and does, as well as by what it fails to say and do.

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<sup>14</sup> Other church activities of the Samoan church that educate are youth recreational programs—it teaches youth how to interact and communicate with others as faithful partners in the life of the church through sports and entertainment; *fa'afalefa*—a gathering (of more than one organization) for spiritual enrichment through acting biblical drama, singing inspiration, and cultural presentation.

In an even larger context, the Samoan church has a significant role to play in modeling the type of community of belief and practice it purports to be: the Samoan church—as one manifestation of the way God is at work in the world.

Attempting to weave a curriculum for religious education of Samoan spirituality at this point is crucial. This attempt will bring into line the voices of Samoan participants in order to formulate a curriculum grounded on Fa'a-Samoa and understanding of God. It will focus on shaping the inner dimension of Samoan faith. This curriculum is what Maria Harris considered “the practice of fashioning a people.”<sup>15</sup> Harris employs this image in forming and reforming the course of the church’s life. She added significant standards of excellence that require skills, intelligence, knowledge, creativity, dedication, imagination, and discipline.<sup>16</sup> These important standards are certainly needed to enhance Samoan religious education for Samoan spirituality. Samoan spirituality should be something religiously and socially established and a joint Samoan activity.

To fashion a curriculum, I will establish some categories that deal with the nature of the Samoan learner, the ways of teaching, and the objective of religious education. I will match each category with Fa'a-Samoa traditions of education. The curriculum will include several categories such as:

- a theological assumption—*taofiga fa'a-mataupu silisili*
- educational assumption—*taofiga fa'a-a'oa'oga*
- dimension of faith engaged—*vaega o le fa'atuatua o aofia ai*
- curricular starting points—*vaega amata o polokalama*

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<sup>15</sup> Maria Harris, Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 8.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

- methods—*auala e fa'agaoioi ai*
- teacher/learner—*faiaoga ma latou ua a'oa'oina*

These categories will help define more fully the curricular-focus of Samoan educational ministry and its future course. Randolph Miller suggests that a curriculum like this “has value as a position in dialogue with Christian education and with various metaphysical and theological positions.”<sup>17</sup> Only in this way will the gospel of Jesus Christ be taught to all people and of all ages in terms of the relationships between persons and God within the Samoan Christian community. Creating a healthy Samoan community of faith allows us to celebrate our differences and share reflective ideas about Christ for nurturing the community’s spiritual growth.

#### Theological Assumption – *Taofiga Fa'a-Mataupu Silisili*

The Samoan participants believe that God is uniquely present in their struggle to live a better life here in the United States. As Christians, they believe that God exists and is presently and actively engaged in their lives. Though we use terms such as *matagofie* (wonderful), *malosi* (powerful), *amiotonu* (righteous), *agalelei* (merciful), and *paia* (holy) to describe God, none of them alone can completely capture the identity of God. Because that identity must be both experienced and learned, we commit ourselves to a living and learning environment which nurtures the whole person.

Samoans affirm that, as God’s people, we are endowed with the ability to respond to, and ultimately to know and achieve intimacy with God. This intimacy with God results in life growing ever more well-balanced with God’s nature, which can be

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<sup>17</sup> Randolph Crump Miller, The Theory of Christian Education Practice: How Theology Affects Christian Education (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1980), 165.

described in terms of goodness, beauty, truthfulness, freedom, and love. Because these qualities transcend all cultural, historical, and ethnic boundaries, Samoan Christians seek to do the same. The following reflects some of the participants' theological responses on their lived experience living in the United States.

*...e le mafai ona tu'ulafoa'i a'u e le Atua alofa. O lona alofa na te tausia ai a'u. E ui ina ou mativa ma paie na te foa'i mai le malosi ou te saili ai lo'u manuia.*

...God never leaves me because of his love. His love takes care of me everyday. Regardless of how lazy I am, God gives me strength to seek because God knows my need.

*...Fa'a-Samoa lava e iloa ai uiga alofa o le Atua. O le autu o le Fa'a-Samoa, o le ola fealofani o tagata; o le aganu'u ua fa'aali mai ai le Atua i tagata Samoa...e pei fo'i ona fa'aali i isi tagata e ala i a latou lava aganu'u.*

...Fa'a-Samoa helps me to understand God's love. The aim of Fa'a-Samoa is the maintenance of good life; is the culture for God to reveal Godself to the Samoans...just as God reveals to other people in their own cultural and religious beliefs.

*...ou te mafaufau pea i le alofa o le Atua i lo'u aiga. Sa matou le maua ni galuega a o lenei ua tofu le fanau ma galuega e tausi ai lo matou. E moni le upu a le Alii...ou te tiga ma outou pe a outou puapuagatia.*

I continue to think about the love of God for my family; didn't have any jobs ... but now all of my children have jobs to support the family. Surely the Lord suffer with his people in times of struggling.

*O le ekalesia Samoa o le nuu i Amerika. A leai se ekalesia Samoa i Amerika e leai se uiga taua o mea fai a tagata; e fa'aali le ola tautua o Samoa i le Atua i le fa'aeaea i le aufaigaluega a le ekalesia.*

The Samoan church serves as a village in America. If the Samoan church is absent in America, there is no value in what we do as Samoans. We show love to God by serving the church and respecting the *fai'feau*.

*O a'oa'oga fa'a-mataupu silisili ua aoga tele ia te a'u...ilo ai i le vafeagai o le tagata ma le Atua...ou te iloa lelei ai lo'u tiute i le Atua.<sup>18</sup>*

Theological education is very important for me ... to understand my relationship with God...and responsibility to God.

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<sup>18</sup> Tuiafono Iaulualo, Vao Aloese, Mose Satini, Tauati Malietufa, discussion with author, 11 June 2006.



From the above theological reactions, the Samoans believe that God is helping them to gain knowledge, both through spiritual discernment and by exploring that which God has done in their lives—history. They claimed that God has liberated them from the power of the world. They are liberated from the power of *le faigaluega* (unemployment), *le tautua lotu* (non-discipleship), and *paie* (lazy life). These are the powers that Samoan religious education should focus on its educational practice. It should add to the understanding of Fa'a-Samoa and God and therefore be rooted in a pertinent living theology. From this theological reflection we draw the educational assumptions for religious education.

#### Educational Assumption – Taofiga Fa'a-A'oa'oga

The Samoan Christians have learned that mutual activity is best for all Samoans. Joint participation in the community is fundamental to the learning and understanding of Fa'a-Samoa. It is not merely participation in the listening and observing of the cultural practices of Samoa. It includes the “doing” and “practicing” of the Fa'a-Samoa. This is how learning takes place; it also takes place when we reflect on God's presence in our lived experience.

It is for this reason that religious educational assumptions should look at every Samoan dimension that shapes the Samoan faith. They should first consider the Samoan *aiga* (family)—the primary social life of Samoa. When the “heart” of religious education is taught and *aiga* are able to take part in the process, religious education will effectively shape the Samoan belief and life, influence how they perceive the world, how they act toward others, and how they shape their values and actions.

Philip Sheldrake proposes that “Because our thinking about God, church and the human person necessarily develops under the influence of theology as well as human

knowledge and historical events, every generation has to redefine what spirituality is meant to encompass.”<sup>19</sup> In the United States, Samoan spirituality is influence in many unaccountable ways—the politics of the media, economy, immigration issues, and the like. For this reason, Samoan religious education for spiritual formation should encompass words and actions that can give confidence to others who are weak, absence from community discourses, lapsed in *aiga* relationship, and low self-esteem. There is a need for a paradigm shift in the general approach to Fa’a-Samoa theology of spirituality. This shift is a greater reflection on Samoan experience as source of theology of Samoan spirituality. The views gathered from some of the Samoan participants reveal this same educational assumption.

*Afai e le feso’ota’i a’oa’oga Fa’a-Samoa ma a’oa’oga a le Tusi Paia, e le mafai fo’i ona loloto ma fa’amaoni le fa’atuatua o tagata i le Atua. O le olaga i Samoa e ese...tele suiga...*

If teaching of the Fa’a-Samoa and teaching of the Bible cannot connect in meaningful ways, then people’s faith in God cannot be deeply nurtured. Life in Samoa is different from life here...too many changes...

*...ona silafia e faiaoga Samoa o le tagata e taua atu i lo mataupu ua a’oa’oina. Soo se mataupu i totonu o ekalesia e ao ona fa’atatau i le tagata ia lagolago i le fa’atuatua i le Atua.*

...educators should always remember that the individual person is more important than the content. Any subject taught in the church should focus directly on shaping the learner’s faith in God.

*...soo se mataupu lava e fa’asaga ese ma a’oa’oga a le Tusi Paia e leai se aoga i le tagata fa’alogo...*<sup>20</sup>

...any subject that is disconnected from the teachings of the Bible is useless to those who listen...

It is strongly revealed in these statements from the Samoan participants that religious education occurs within a social context, the *aiga* or *ekalesia* (church). It discloses the

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<sup>19</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 32.

<sup>20</sup> Tauluava’a Leatiota, Rapi Tu’ufuli, Selulo Lago’o, and Aso Vee, discussion with author, 23 May 2006.

personal transformation emerges out of Fa'a-Samoa praxis. Samoan religious education is enhanced when it taps into the vibrant passions and beliefs of the participants. In this case, teaching of Fa'a-Samoa is necessary for enhancing vibrant Samoan spirituality.

Being the primary ecology of spirituality, the Samoan family plays a primary role in the educational ecology. Therefore, it is the locus for continuing to enforce the learning of Fa'a-Samoa and the Bible as the main norms for spiritual formation and enriching Samoan spirituality. This can be done through *talanoaga* (storytelling), *tu ma aga* (ritual reenactments), and *tala o aiga* (genealogy). These norms create imaginative thinking for educational assumption. Mary Elizabeth Moore suggests that it will “open the way for people to gain perspective on their own lives, to perceive the world of another culture, and to envision alternate possibilities for life on the earth.”<sup>21</sup>

Moore implies that the relational heart and imagination are the dimensions of faith engaged. As one connects to others in the common places of human needs one's own identity is reinforced. Psychologically, this connection uses a process of simultaneous reflection and observation on all levels of mental functioning, an essential process for the self to develop.<sup>22</sup> This implies that there is no individuality apart from community, since isolation from relationships with others leads to identity crisis and undeveloped faith.

#### Dimension of Faith Engaged – *Vaega o le Fa'atuatua o Aofia Ai*

There is nothing better than seeing the Samoan conscious and passion nurtured through engagement with social, political, economic, and education issues. Socialization

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<sup>21</sup> Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 143.

<sup>22</sup> See also Erik H. Erikson, Identity: Youth and Crisis (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 22-27.

for this takes place in the work place, school, and church activities, but the foundation always begins in the *aiga*. It is in the *aiga* that family-like and communal intimacy occurs. It is in the *aiga* and *ekalesia* that cognitive belief is influenced and shaped. Embracing the church as *aiga* is a big part of understanding the relationship between God and Fa'a-Samoa. The following statements from the Samoan participants may be helpful to further elaborate on this matter.

*Ese le aoga o lo'u auai i talanoaga o fai i le City Hall. Ua ou malamalama i nisi fa'afitauli o loo tutupu i aoga ma le malo, ae maise lava le mea tau tupe mo kolisi. Fa'alogo i le lauga i le aso Sa ua aoga e fa'alototele ai a'u e su'esu'e i nei mataupu.*

My participating in some of the issues argued at the City Hall is so refreshing. I am able to understand some of the crises happening in the government, especially the financial problem about colleges. I believe listening to the *faifeau's* sermon on Sunday has encouraged me to participate in these issues.

*...aoga le fa'amalosi a le faifeau e fa'alogologo ma faitau i nusipepa ma tala i le televise. I ai mataupu o le soifua maloloina ma tagata matutua e talanoaina e maua ai fesoasoani mo tagata lautele...*

...pastor's encouragement to listen to the news on television and read the paper has helped me. I have learned about issues...healthcare and medicare for the old folks. These issues are discussed by those who are doing the research.

*O le o fa'atasi o a'oa'oga a le Tusi Paia ma le Fa'a-Samoa e taua mo le fa'amalosia o lou ta'u o oe o le Samoa...*<sup>23</sup>

The interweaving of teaching Fa'a-Samoa and the Bible is significant for the encouragement and development of one's identity as a Samoan...

From the above responses, Samoan religious education helps nurture the inner-spirit and drives out the fear that stop the participants from seeking other mediums for learning. This entire process of learning has tried to animate that inner power which motivates and rekindles their strength to seek different avenues of learning. Participating in the City Hall conversation, listening to the news, reading the newspaper, and interpreting biblical

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<sup>23</sup> Talofa Toleafoa, Sio P. Silifaiva, and Talatonu Silifaiva, discussion with author, 23 May 2005.

thoughts from a Samoan perspective helps stimulate faith at the inner-pulse that drives them. This inner-pulse should be the heartbeat of religious education for Fa'a-Samoa spirituality. It is a strong way to link the Christian values to the values of Fa'a-Samoa toward the goal of transformation.

Charles Foster, in his understanding of the church's educational ministry, speaks about the "connection to the mystery of holiness." He found that people often come to church not only because they wanted to listen to God's word but "They were seeking an intimate moment with the mystery of God."<sup>24</sup> This implies that there are some points in life when our memories ignited some hope for us—that if we could hear God's salvific history we might experience a healing word to transform our painful situation. Going to the City Hall, listening to the news on television, or reading the Bible are not the only ways of learning new meanings but ways of deeply seeking an intimate relationship with God—the source of all knowing.

Stimulating of the Samoan faith to nurture our inner-spirit is significant to social justice and compassion. It can help shape and influence our belief for social change and economic consciousness. When we are part of the life situations of the people (learner), we participate in a system of larger meaning and values that can help move us toward involvement in the global human struggle—financially, economically, politically, etc. From this involvement, we can see precisely where the passion of those who we help emerges. Life situations, passions and gifts, interests and questions, and the energy of those we seek to help should be the curricular starting point of any Samoan religious education for spiritual formation and empowerment.

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<sup>24</sup> Charles R. Foster, Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 53.

### Curricular Starting Points – *Vaega Amata o Polokalama*

The major elements of curriculum are context and content. These elements are often complicated and difficult to understand when participants are not sincerely involved in the designing, implementing and teaching. The spiritual need of the people should be the curricular starting point in religious education. However, the social, economic, political, or educational needs and especially the social wounds in a community must be an important starting point for Samoan religious education.

Paulo Freire described the act of teaching as: “The educator is a politician and an artist who must use the science of techniques but must never become a cold, neutral technician.”<sup>25</sup> Freire implies that intellectual knowledge—a politician who has information on current events and an artist who shapes art through his or her imagination and experience of the world—was not adequate for resolving issues when people’s lives are deeply injured. For this reason, he argues that education needs to change politically, and that the curriculum changes will be inspired by the very people whom we think we are teaching. Some of the Samoan participants’ views echoes Freire’s theory.

*O le tele a o taimi e foliga mai o taimi lava o taumafataga ma talanoaga a aiga e a’oa’oina ai le tagata. O le fefa’asoaiga o mafauauga i le taimi e taumamafa ai e tele ai upu...aua ua maona le laualo. E le gata fo’i i lea o taimi o galuega fa’a-le-aiga poo mea fo’i e tutupu i fanau e a’oa’oina ai le mafauau i mea o loo tutupu...*

It appears to me that the only good time for our family to have a deep dialogue is during meal time. That is the only time our family sits together and talks about us and other issues. Other times like family maintenance or issues about children are times when we talk and gain meaningful perspectives...

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<sup>25</sup> Paulo Freire, Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau, trans. Carman St. John Hunter (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 28-29.

<sup>26</sup> Simolo Taula’i, Atapana Malaepule, and Aso Vee, discussion with author, 10 March 2004.

*...ou te iloa mea o tutupu i le matou aulotu i taimi o fono a le matou komiti o le atina'e. O nisi taimi fa'ato'a maua iloa ma le tina i aoga pese na fai se fono a le ekalesia.*

...I knew what happened to our church during time of our church committee meeting. Often my wife and I know that we had a meeting during choir practice.

*Ua ma fa'anoanoa lava ma lo'u to'alua ina ua iloa ua ma'i lo'u afafine. E pei e valea lo'u mafaufau ua ou le iloa poo le a la'u tala a fai. O fa'afitauli fa'apea ou te fa'alagolago i le faifeau mo se tali lelei pe a lauga i le aso Sa.*

My wife and I are saddened that our daughter is pregnant. My mind went crazy and didn't know what to say or do. This kind of problems I depend on the *faifeau* that he would give us a good answer when he preaches on Sunday.

*O a'u o le matai i lo'u aiga; ua leva fo'i ona ou tautua i lo'u aiga ma le atunu'u. Lenei ua ou nofo i Amerika...sa ou fa'apea lava e le toe aoga le a'oa'oina o le Fa'a-Samoa. E ui i lea e sese a'u...e taua tele le fa'ailoa i tupulaga le mamalu o le aganu'u i puipuiga o aulotu ma le fa'amalosia o le fa'atuatua o tagata i le Atua.*

I am a chief in my family; I served my family for many years. Now I'm living in America...I thought teaching Fa'a-Samoa is not necessarily needed here. But I was wrong...it is vital to let our young people know the sacredness of the Fa'a-Samoa culture and tradition in protecting church and Samoan families, and especially in fostering the faith of people in God.

*...e pei lava e i ai se mea sese ua ou faia ua le tautala mai ai le faifeau ia te a'u...<sup>26</sup>*

...I must have done something wrong to the *faifeau* for not speaking to me...

From these expressions, we find that the curricular starting point of religious education should always be the individual situation. The life situations—dysfunctional family, unemployment, poverty, teenage pregnancy, etc—of the community or individuals must always be the starting point for education. Where is life drained in the family? Where is conversation for life and celebration of events taking place? Where do we see people with their passions nurtured? These are some of the questions that must be at the forefront of any Samoan religious education practice for spirituality.

Samoan religious educators need to get in touch with the world of the people we love, and must continue to get involved in their conversation so we can be informed with the truth. Parker Palmer suggests that “It is not our knowledge of conclusions that keeps us in the truth [but] our commitment to the conversation itself. We need to know the current conclusions in order to get in on the conversation.”<sup>27</sup> Palmer suggests that for us to be in the truth itself we must know how to look, speak, and listen with passion. We must know how to exegete—using the five human senses—what we observe and hear. Because the truth continues to change from time to time, we need to continue changing our listening, speaking, and looking techniques in order to stay with the truth.

Our knowledge from listening, speaking, and looking techniques can provide appropriate analysis and information to help us construct a method for Samoan religious education for spiritual formation.

#### Methods – *Auala e Fa'agaoioi Ai*

A different situation requires a different method of doing religious education. Method varies and it should help enhance the intentional education for each event such as church meetings, baptism, youth service, parenting classes—not only in the family but the community. It should not be based primarily on the teacher’s agenda but also on the hidden agenda (the flow of the event). Effective method is essential to create educational activities that participate in the birthing of new experience, new ideas, solidarity, learning opportunities, and commit to allow Samoans to grow into themselves.

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<sup>27</sup> Parker J. Palmer, The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 104.



Method is a way of providing the necessary information and paradigm to help shape the content and focus of religious education. It is a process of what we should do to pursue a dialogue between the content present and our own experience. According to John Lynn Carr, “Our goal here is not mere information; it is transformation, equipping and empowering people to claim and live out a new life of lay ministry in a secular world.”<sup>28</sup> Carr implies that although information often provides intelligence, it cannot be expected to help support individuals with new ways of living and shaping their lives.

*...tatau lava ona i ai nisi auala e fa'amatala ai le talalelei ina ia iloa e tagata ma ola ai.*

...he should have another perfect way of explaining the gospel so we can understand what he's teaching.

*E tautala Samoa lava le matou faifeau ae le malamalama ai tamaiti. E fiu i fai atu e fa'a-papalagi nai isi mataupu ina ia iloa e tamaiti...e leai.*

Our pastor speaks Samoan and the youth could not understand him. He was asked many times to say something in English so the children could understand...not at all.

*Matou faifeau e le malamalama se isi i lana aoga; e tasi a lana filosofia e a'oa'o ai tagata...o lana.*<sup>29</sup>

We cannot understand our pastor's teaching; he only has one philosophy to teach people...his way.

We can see from the above claims that Samoan religious educators should consider and formulate their methods according to the individual needs. This is very important to the shaping of individual learning and meaning-making. The theological position of James Fowler points to this as a way to human survival. Fowler found that the “central act of meaning making...commitment to centering values and joint living is integral to human survival and flourishing.”<sup>30</sup> Fowler implies that embracing human values should be the

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<sup>28</sup> John Lynn Carr, “Needed: A Pastoral Curriculum for the Congregation,” in *The Pastor as Religious Educator*, ed. Robert L. Browning (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1989), 45-50.

<sup>29</sup> Pouniu Laie, Fiaumi Taula, and Seuvaai Lelaki, discussion with author, 24 Jan. 2006.

central emphasis of any educational event that hopes to generate meaning that contributes to spiritual growth.

Forming faith communities or teaching people for the formation of faith involve both those who are community educators—who deals with the psychology of the faith life—and those who are struggling to learn the skills to enable them to understand the full message of society and life. In other words, it involves both the teacher and the learner who listens and shares the content of life. To have a strong listening connection between the teacher and learner, then, “calls for an awareness of the content, the feelings, and the context of our communication.”<sup>31</sup>

#### Teacher and Learner Relationship – *Faiaoga ma i Latou ua A’oa’oia*

Paulo Freire claims that education should be a practice of freedom.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, the teacher should empower the learner to be a teacher as well. The relationship between the teacher and the learner should be dialogical and transformational. The teacher is not merely an instructor but rather a “midwife”—facilitating the birth of epistemology (how we know what we know). If it’s the Fa’a-Samoa that is taught, the teacher is the facilitator between the tradition and the learner. The hermeneutical framework of Fowler helps further enhance this point.

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<sup>30</sup> James W. Fowler, Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 79.

<sup>31</sup> See Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead, Community of Faith: Models and Strategies for Building Christian Communities (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 122.

<sup>32</sup> A common theory reflected in almost all of Paulo Freire’s writings for social consciousness and education for the poor.

Fowler found that group or individual experience originates where people “were invited to share their life and faith pilgrimages with each other.”<sup>33</sup> What Fowler points out is very crucial to the teacher-learner relationship. Inviting others to share their faith is an encounter that can awaken a sense of self and yield clues to who we are. It will help inspire meaning that will have much effect on the heart of both the teacher and learner. That is faith-education pilgrimage that transforms people. My participants’ responses reveals this:

*...manaia lava matou aoga Tusi Paia e fetufaa'i lava matou mafaufauga ma si faifeau.*

...we always share our thoughts and understanding with the pastor at the Bible study.

*...tele ina fesili mai le faifeau i fesili e fa'alautele ai le mataupu e fa'atupu manatu ma loloto ai le iloa.*

...the pastor asked questions that not only enhanced the subject-matter but inspired deep thoughts that caused us to understand.

*... fa'atalanoaina o se mataupu e aofia ai le faiaoga ma le tagata aoga; e fetufaa'i i le uiga o le mataupu. Afai e le soalaupule se mataupu, e le taitai ona loloto sona uiga ma se tali.*

... discussions should include the teacher and learner; they share the meaning of the subject. If the subject-matter is not shared among us, it will never reach a full understanding or meaning.

*...o a'oa'oga e liliu ai loto o tagata o aoga laia e talatalanoa fa'atasi le faiaoga ma le tagata aoga.*

...teaching that inspires my heart is the kind of teaching that shares the content between me and the teacher.

*...a leai se uiga o se mataupu i lo'u olaga, o le a le mea a sui ai fua le mea ua ou ola ma talitonu i ai.*<sup>34</sup>

...if a subject has no real meaning for me, why should I change the way what I live and believe in.

The participants reveal a strategy for conducting the teaching-and-learning session that consists of practicing active-dialogue. In this way, it has provided a way of linking facts

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 79-80.

<sup>34</sup> Toese Tafili, Leitu Teofilo, Isaia, Agamalu Tafili, Poumele, discussion with author, 20 Feb. 2004.

and doctrines to the teacher/learner attitudes and values. The *faiʻeau* is not a lecturer but a facilitator. This relationship can help celebrate the life that is born into being, give opportunity to the learners to name their experience, and allow a voice from other resources.

Teacher-learner relationship should be the promising direction of Samoan religious education for spiritual empowerment. If not, then the teacher will dominate all discussion, imposing his/her own experience, and embracing his/her own values as the content. Bell Hooks found that this kind of emphasis “in which introjections of experiential truths into classroom debates dead-end the discussion.”<sup>35</sup> Hooks implies that the infusing of personal experience—teacher and learner—must incorporate into the discussion in ways that deepen the subject-matter or content of discussion.

The above discussion of several categories is helpful to the constructing of a curriculum for religious education of Fa’a-Samoa spirituality. Most importantly, it will help rethink a better way to learn and practice the Fa’a-Samoa in its totality.

### Learning and Practicing of Fa’a-Samoa

Samoan religious educators seemed to forget much of the interest in the study of social influences on the growth of Samoans in the teaching and learning context. This reflected many of the misapplication of the biblical teaching, loss of self-determination, the shrinking in numbers of Sunday school attendance, and lack of interest in coming to church. It also reflected the lack of interest in learning and practicing of Fa’a-Samoa in

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<sup>35</sup> Bell Hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom (New York: Routledge, 1994), 85. [Note that the author’s name, bell hooks, is spell in lowercase as it appears on the cover of the textbook.]

the United States. As a result, the Fa'a-Samoa has become an individual commodity rather than a community property. Samoans now learn and practice Fa'a-Samoa in the confinement of their homes. From the Fa'a-Samoa perspective, this is the starting place of individualism.

Individualism became the “top sell” commodity from workplace to family, from classroom to business, and from social club to private living. The “I-AM”<sup>36</sup> is still dominant and has had more influence on the way we carry out teaching and learning in the church than we are aware. Daryl Eldridge says, “Such thinking deals with the individual as though there is nothing beyond the individual and that he is subject to the fate of his own intrinsic operations.”<sup>37</sup> This kind of mindset leaves the impression that teaching and learning begins and ends with the individual.

Eldridge has surely reminded us of what this philosophy can cause for healthy development of an individual within the context of the Samoan church. Teaching and learning does not always end with the individual. I concur that teaching may end with the individual, but not learning. Learning is the by-product of both the teacher and learner, not just the learner.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “I-AM” refers to the self-centered and egocentric attitude that is prevalent in the industrialized and capitalism society of America. This egocentric and self-centered attitude has impacted the lives of many Samoans as well as Americans, especially the lives of those who do everything competing in order to be on the top of the societal ladder. This attitude creates opposition between relationship and community because its emphasis is to please its own self and not the other “selves.”

<sup>37</sup> Daryl Eldridge, The Teaching Ministry of the Church: Integrating Biblical Truth with Contemporary Application (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 90.

<sup>38</sup> In teaching philosophy, teaching begins and ends with the individual. The individual comes with a need and therefore, teaching begins. When his/her need is met, teaching ends. But learning begins and ends with both—teacher and student. The teacher listens to the student in order to understand what his/her need is while the student pays close attention to the teacher to understand how his/her needs could be met. In the process of sharing and helping the student understand the teacher is also taken up with the task of learning.

It is important that in the context for teaching and learning effective dialogue and honest commitment are important factors. They are significant elements in the life of a Samoan religious educator and in the life of the students as well. The best training of students for learning Fa'a-Samoa is a continuous exposure to the quest for dialogue. And the major element of continuous dialogue for a Samoan religious educator is tutorial: face-to-face, week-by-week sessions with the students. The session may begin with a question, "What is Fa'a-Samoa?" or "How do you learn Fa'a-Samoa?" To take these sessions seriously and to act upon them faithfully is to provide an environment in which the efforts of both teacher and students can prosper.

On the other hand, honest commitment promotes teaching Fa'a-Samoa as a holistic achievement and one that has a direct influence upon the Samoans' lives. Such a commitment must be consistent with Christian understanding of teaching that includes the dimension of response to God's truth. To be sincerely involved in teaching and guiding of the Samoans is to be committed to the influence and shaping of their decisions and actions.

Arguing from the feminist perspective, Carol Lakey-Hess argues impressively that "Caring for another is most often understood as nurturing and supporting another's actualization."<sup>39</sup> What Lakey-Hess suggests is that caring can be a essential element of commitment and dialogue for Samoan religious education. It refers to a religious educator's capacity to undertake and respond to someone's need or desires whether it be

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<sup>39</sup> Carol Lakey-Hess, Caretakers of Our Common House: Women's Development in Communities of Faith (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 90. The importance of self-differentiation and cognitive autonomy and or caring and connection are discussed, using as illustrations biblical stories, excerpts from novels, and an in-depth look at eating disorders. The book argues compellingly for an educational process in communities of faith that nurtures women toward being caretakers of their own house (self) and of our common house (the community of faith)."

academically, economically, or psychologically. This caring and responding to the actualization of the Samoan needs will help reshape the Samoan sense of “who they are” and eventually transform the Samoan community and give new implications for practicing the Fa’a-Samoa.

### The Aiga Model in Teaching and Practicing of Fa’a-Samoa

Proverbs 22: 6 begins with these words, “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.” Obviously, these words reveal educating of the children is the sole responsibility of the family and community. The teaching and learning of Fa’a-Samoa begins in the family. This teaching and learning are enriched through the effort of the Samoan educational ministry.

Here in the United States, the typical Samoan family no longer exists. Like the typical American family, Samoan family values and norms are slowly disappearing. George Barna reported that only 7 percent of the population fits the profile of a typical nuclear family.<sup>40</sup> A survey conducted by David Blankenhorn et al found that less than 10 percent of the families in the United States are traditional in the sense that the father works and the mother stays home.<sup>41</sup> A study by Filoialii and Knowles revealed that “For those [Samoans] who live outside Samoa further fragmentation occurs as a result of housing limitations.”<sup>42</sup>

Regardless of these life changes, Samoan family still seemed to be closely

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<sup>40</sup> George Barna, The Future of the American Family (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), 17.

<sup>41</sup> David Blankenhorn, Steven Bayme, and Jean Bethke Elshtain, eds. Rebuilding the Nest (Milwaukee: Family Services America, 1990), 11.

<sup>42</sup> La’auli Ale Filoialii and Lyle Knowles, “Attitudes of Southern California Samoans towards Maintaining the Samoan Way of Life,” Sociology and Social Research 67 (3): 301-311.

connected due to their adherence to Fa'a-Samoa. Fa'a-Samoa is fundamental to the development of the Samoans in the United States. Personal testimonies from several Samoan participants are substantial evidence for this claim.

*E le tatau ona tu'ua le a'oa'oina o le Fa'a-Samoa i a tatou fanau iinei aua o le faitoto'a lea i le a'oa'oina o fanau ina ia iloa ava ma fa'aaloalo i tagata; e iloa ai oe o le Samoa.*

Teaching and learning of Fa'a-Samoa is important to our children...the door to their knowledge of respect for people; identify them as Samoans.

*O le taimi e le a'oa'oina ai le fanau i le Fa'a-Samoa o ina e tupu ai le fa'aletonu i fanau. Le mea lena e alu ai a le tama poo le teine Samoa e aunoa ma se mafaufau i lona aiga ma le atunu'u...aua ua le iloa le tapula'a o le olaga e tatau ona soifua ai...*

The time we forget to teach our children about Fa'a-Samoa is when they will experience social problems. That is the reason why young Samoans go astray without thinking about their families; they forgot the purpose of their lives.

*O a'u o le matai i totonu o lo'u aiga; ou tautua i le atunu'u i Samoa e ala i le nu'u ma le faigamalo. Lenei ua ou nofo i Amerika...sa ou fa'apea e le toe aoga le a'oa'oina o nei aganu'u. Ui i lea e sese a'u...e taua tele le fa'ailoa i tupulaga le mamalu o le aganu'u i puipuiga o aulotu ma aiga Samoa.<sup>43</sup>*

I am a chief in my family; served my village for many years. Now I'm living in America...thought Fa'a-Samoa is not necessary. But I was wrong...it is good to let our youth know the sacredness of the culture to help the church and families.

These statements strongly reveal that the teaching of Fa'a-Samoa is essentially necessary for the Samoan families. Being the primary ecology of spirituality, Samoan family must continue to enforce learning of Fa'a-Samoa as one of the main norms for Samoan spirituality. Although I am convinced that much contemporary spirituality is shaped by consumer impulses, Samoan spirituality may pleasingly keep the Samoan families within the disciplines necessary for engagement with God.

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<sup>43</sup> Vao Aloese, Tuiafono Iaulualo, Fa'avae Poumele, Toese Tafili, discussion with author, 12-13 Aug. 2005. It must be noted that the author has spent over five years affiliated and worked with these individuals at the Samoan Congregational Christian Church of National City in San Diego (1999-2004).



Parents are the primary teachers of Fa'a-Samoa in the family. They are the “care-givers” and keepers of the customs and traditions of Fa'a-Samoa. When young Samoans don't know much about their Fa'a-Samoa, then the shaping of their faith suffers. When asked my Samoan participant parents how they teach their children about Fa'a-Samoa, they provided the following answers:

*E fa'ata'ita'i i upu masani e pei o le “tulou,” “fa'amolemole,” “fa'afetai” ma isi a upu e taua ona iloa e tamaiti. A fa'atonu ma a'oa'i ia iloa le sese...*

We teach them the common words like “excuse me,” “please,” “thank you” and courtesy they should know. We talk to them so they will know what they have done wrong...

*O maua e ave le ma fanau i le aoga Samoa a le faifeau. Ae fai fo'i le tiute o maua: aua le 'ai ma tautalai; aua ne'i oso i le tagata matua... aua fo'i le fusu pe fa'amisa i lona tuafafine...*

We take our children to the Samoan pastor school. We also teach them by guiding them: they are not to talk with the mouth full, don't talk back to the elders...do not start fighting with the sister.

*E fa'aaoga e le tama tusi Samoa e a'oa'o ai le fanau. O le tama lava e gafa ma le a'oa'o ina o le atalii i feau fa'aleaiga e pei o le fofo'e fa'i, fai le sua i'a...*

My husband and I used some Samoan literatures to teach our children. He teaches his son how to do household chores or to prepare food like peeling bananas, and cooking fish...

*A fa'aletonu se tasi o la'u fanau e fa'atonu. E a'oa'o ia iloa tautala fa'aaloalo i tagata... e pei o le “susu mai lau susuga” poo le “lau susuga i le fa'afeagaiga.” Upu fa'apea e a'oa'o ai fanau...<sup>44</sup>*

We usually disciplined our children if they behave badly. We teach them courtesy and good manners; to speak with respect to elders...like “please welcome” or the “your honor pastor.” These words we should teach our children.

Teaching and applying these Samoan values and practices to our children will greatly add to the young Samoans' understanding of Fa'a-Samoa. On the other hand, because the

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<sup>44</sup> Siaaso'ai Tali, Senetenari Tupou, Sina Aloalo Tautala, Talanoa Itula, discussion with author, 25 Jun. 2006.

focus of teaching in the family is primarily cultural and biblical, these practices will also contribute to their knowledge of God, enabling what the parents sow in tears of self-knowledge to be reaped in joy in the children's knowledge of God.

Awareness of these issues may help the Samoan parents understand the need to teach Fa'a-Samoa to their children. The Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa in Southern California Conference proposed certain Fa'a-Samoa programs and events to help the youth learn their culture. There is an annual youth conference in the month of April for the Samoan youth to partake in Fa'a-Samoa events. This event is called *Fa'afalefa* or Youth Fellowship of four or more groups. When we participate in this event we bring different styles of gospel music, dramatization, and Fa'a-Samoa presentations. This is the way we connect to our heritage and make meaning of who we are as Samoan Christians. Palmer says that this is “the kind of teaching and learning that can help renew and express the capacity of connectedness at the heart of authentic education.”<sup>45</sup> Religious education like *Fa'afalefa* is about plowing the inner spirit to help renew the Samoan spiritual life that is firmly grounded on the teaching of the Bible and Fa'a-Samoa—from which the Samoan faith community develops.

### Teaching of Fa'a-Samoa Beliefs and Norms

The best way to teach Fa'a-Samoa is to engage the Samoans in defining and expressing their own understanding of Samoan cultural beliefs and practices—are Samoan values.<sup>46</sup> One way to accomplish this task is that Samoan religious educator

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<sup>45</sup> Palmer, *Courage to Teach*, 89.

<sup>46</sup> There are two kinds of values—factual and normative. Factual values are observable

must prepare a series of questions to stimulate-thinking and provoke ways to allow the Samoans to name their own understanding of Fa'a-Samoa. Participants in this study were asked the following questions to help enrich the teaching of Fa'a-Samoa.<sup>47</sup>

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <i>O le a lau ta'u o lou talitonuga ma fa'atinoga?</i>                  | What do you call your belief and practice?                                 |
| <i>E fa'apefea ona tupu? Anafea ma fa'apefea ona amata?</i>             | How did it come to be this way? When and how did it start?                 |
| <i>O a nisi talitonuga poo fa'atinoga o feso'ota'i i ai?</i>            | What other beliefs or practice is it connected to?                         |
| <i>O le a lona eseesea poo le tutusa ma tulaga o faia e isi?</i>        | Why is it different or similar to what others do?                          |
| <i>O a mafuaaga ua e faia ai? Le a lona taua mo oe ma lau fanau?</i>    | What are the reasons you do it? What does it do for your child or for you? |
| <i>O le a sau fa'amatalaga i lau fanau ma isi e uiga i lea mea?</i>     | What do you tell your child or others about it?                            |
| <i>O le a lou lagona ia ua e faia?</i>                                  | How did you feel when doing it?  |
| <i>O le a lona fa'aletomu pe a e le faia, pe e te le mafaia fo'i?</i>   | What would happen if you did not or could not do it?                       |
| <i>E tupu ai se afaina poo se feeseeseaiga ia te oe ma nisi? Aisea?</i> | Does it cause conflict or ambivalence for you or others? Why?              |
| <i>Fa'amata e fa'aolioliina ai oe, fiafia, masiasi...?</i>              | Does it make you feel proud, happy, ashamed, or...?                        |

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preferences, considerations, and desires of concrete people at a given time. Normative values are the ratings which people ought to give to value objects. Normative values are more difficult to establish than factual values; these make a deeper claim of validity, presume to have persuasive force and regulative power. Factual values are neither right nor wrong but are facts of observation; they vary from place to place and from time to time; their claim is only with respect to popularity and persistence. For a detailed discussion of human values, see Abraham Maslow, New Knowledge in Human Values (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959).

<sup>47</sup> These questions were used by the author during his research in the Samoan community. The questions were based entirely on Fa'a-Samoa experience and feedbacks from the participants; they have been able to enrich the strategy of the research and helped narrow down the focus of my research.

*Afai e mafai ona sui se isi vaega, o le a  
lena vaega?*

If you could change some part of it,  
what part?

*O le a le taua ia te oe?*

How important is it to you?

This series of questions were asked during my research in the Samoan community. They are helpful for the Samoan-American born to make-sense of their own Fa'a-Samoa. My research reveals that Samoan-Americans not only lack understanding Fa'a-Samoa, there also exist contradictions between Fa'a-Samoa values and American values.

The initial context of teaching Fa'a-Samoa is the *aiga*. *Aiga* is always the starting point of learning Fa'a-Samoa; one of the most stable features of the Samoan community. Not only has the remarkable conservatism of Fa'a-Samoa been attributed to the *aiga*, but it has been credited with creating conditions for the successful adaptation of modernizing migrant Samoans by providing economic, social, and emotional support. All these are vital parts for the Samoan religious education for spiritual growth and nurture.

#### A Practical Description of Samoan Church Religious Education for Spiritual Formation

What I have already laid out in this chapter, I will attempt to construct a practical description of religious education focus for spiritual formation in the Samoan church. What been discussed has given me the insight and knowledge to appropriately design a fitting theological role and ministry for the Samoan church in the United States.

The task of the Samoan church is to become a safe refuge for all the Samoans. The following is a statement from the Samoan Congregational Christian Church of South Los Angeles, UCC, will help illustrates the foundation and essence of Samoan religious education focused.

We realized the need for a new perspective in the Samoan ministry to address the changing needs and challenges facing the Samoan people who have migrated to the United States. We recognized that the first Samoans migrated to the U.S. were faced with challenges of acculturation. Being mindful of that, our vision is to help establish and sustain the faith of the Samoan Christians within the local communities. With the increase of the Samoan population throughout the years, our goal is to take an active role in the faith development of various Samoan communities. Our belief in that Christ has better served in providing the much-needed resources for our community of faith and the neighboring communities. We believe our service to the community will help facilitate a holistic spiritual growth and well-being of all Samoans. The Samoan church is committed to serve as a religious and social gathering resort to the Samoan communities in the mainland of the United States. Due to a plethora of problems in our community, more people seem to be open to the Good News of Christ that at any other time in this century.

Inspired by this passion, we moved to afford a place for worship, multicultural religious education and events, spiritual formation, counseling, tutoring and mentoring program and Christian fellowship for the Samoan community. With a global and ecumenical vision and a catholic spirit, the Samoan church keenly pursues vocational discernment, spirituality enrichment, and responsible social commitment. Nurtured by the Christian tradition, we prepare effective members and leaders for service to God, the church, and the world. Our mission is to establish a disciple pedagogical-making process that encourages Samoan to act on what they learn and rewards them when they do. We draw upon our heritage as Samoan Christians, where Samoan culture—Fa'a-Samoa—emphasis on communal responsibility is express in our daily worship, education and ministry. We see our Fa'a-Samoa as a unique God given gift among the many wonderful cultures in this world. In that capacity, we are committed to diversity.<sup>48</sup>

Clearly and proudly reflects in this statement is the precise direction and methodology the Samoan church religious education should follow. Religious education should urge the Samoan Christians to move one, to be open to the new challenges, new future, and the new mission to the new culture. Without this purpose, the spiritual well-being of the Samoan Christians becomes passive. A sense of purpose means the focus on an awareness of direction, and a reason for being.

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<sup>48</sup> From the Fa'avae o le Ekalesia Samoa Kerisiano i Los Angeles Saute (Manual of the Samoan Congregational Christian Church of South Los Angeles), 7 Aug. 2006.

### Summary

This chapter showcases some of the Fa'a-Samoa values and perspectives significant both to the nurturing of Samoan spirituality and practice. The discussion of these values and perspectives are helpful in empowering the spiritual life of Samoan Christians. As I had stated earlier, the majority of the Samoan Christians in the United States were not schooled in the rudiments of Fa'a-Samoa. The showcasing of Fa'a-Samoa and how its religious and cultural values are applied to their Christian faith is significantly relevant for them. It allows them great opportunity to consider several vital aspects of a Samoan situation, judge how each cultural piece fits into the whole situation, and be able to respond appropriately. These developing mental and social skills bring increased mental ability for them to deal with theological and cultural concepts, particularly Fa'a-Samoa religious concepts.

The discussion also reminds the Samoan religious educators that, the Bible as the Word of God is always our textbook, but the perspective and action—Fa'a-Samoa—we use to teach is the Samoan way. Our choice of Fa'a-Samoa and biblical literatures is a reflection of the importance that we place on the educational ministry of the Samoan church. Taking into account the high goals and subject matter of Samoan religious education, choosing the proper curriculum is serious business.

Much of the content of this chapter (and the entire study) serve as a testimony for the Samoan religious educators. God's Word is worthy of our best preparation and the Samoan church is responsible for practicing and teaching it. I am reminded of what apostle Timothy once written: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved

by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.”<sup>49</sup>

Teaching is an awesome responsibility and requires Samoans who are not only committed, but also well equipped.

Finally, the educational ministry of the Samoan church does not begin in the church sanctuary but at home—the *aiga*. This chapter has helped highlight some of the promising ways to elevate religious education of Fa’a-Samoa for spiritual empowerment both at the Samoan homes and church. The spiritual growth and vitality of the Samoan church is dependent upon an effective educational ministry. For those who function in leadership positions in the Samoan church, they have a primary responsibility for training and equipping those who teach the body of Christ. This ideal way to nurture Samoan spiritual formation is not forcing people into learning but gently lead them to learn practical things and bring out their own natural talents. Samoan religious educators should help mobilize the learners’ talents and gifts in better ways to help develop in faith.

The next chapter discusses Fa’a-Samoa as psychotherapy of Samoan spirituality. It looks at how the Fa’a-Samoa can become a metaphor which creates community of faith and nurturing human living in the midst of resources for healing—the mind, body, and soul.

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<sup>49</sup> 2 Tim. 2:15, NRSV.

## CHAPTER 6

FA'A-SAMOA AS PSYCHOTHERAPY OF SAMOAN SPIRITUALITY:  
CULTIVATING WHOLENESS OF THE MIND, BODY, AND SOUL

The previous chapter discussed Fa'a-Samoa as practice of Samoan spirituality. It is the aim of this chapter to offer a description of Fa'a-Samoa as psychotherapy<sup>1</sup> of Samoan spirituality. The attempt is to help provide a closely reasoned and practical answer to the question: How is Fa'a-Samoa related to the total health of the individual? A painstaking and detailed answer to this question would require another philosophical study in itself. But in this chapter I will offer few tentative thoughts and help recall Fa'a-Samoa to its therapeutic nature and to its inner influence in the cure of the mind-body-soul.

Samoans have expectations and hopes for wholeness in the Fa'a-Samoa thinking pattern and ideology. Fa'a-Samoa has beliefs or practices psychologically destined for healing. Samoans run into trouble when they need healing, not because they have failed to discover the only solution to their problems, but because they are blind to their own resources when disconnected from the demands of life situations. As I have proposed throughout this study, Fa'a-Samoa can contribute tremendous life-saving ideas and therapeutic approaches to help Samoans deal with challenging life issues.

Today, a mountain of literature dealing with mental disorders has been

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<sup>1</sup> It must be noted that the use of psychotherapy (*psyche* – “mind” and *therapy* – “treatment”) in this study refers to a long-term reconstructive therapeutic method when growth is deeply diminished by multiple crises in life. The attempt is to employ the Fa'a-Samoa therapeutic method of wholeness in this long-term reconstructive process. Fa'a-Samoa promotes wholeness because it relates the total person to the entire environment—our life and experience with others and nature. The assertion is evidently provable that lively participation in the Fa'a-Samoa norms helps eliminate neuroses and psychological stresses which causes mental illness. Using of Fa'a-Samoa as therapy resource may lead to emotional and psychological maturity. See the Samoan *ifoga* as an example.



remarkably constructive and relevant. The usefulness of psychotherapy in the church ministry in dealing with troubled minds and souls has been dominant. Church ministers and leaders have realized the capability of cultural norms and pathways to help congregations make meaning of their lives, especially during this time when there are so many disturbances going on around the world. When ends become lopsided and when individuals and systems work against each other, the flow of healing is disrupted. Where else do we go for help to cope with our problems?

In the Western culture, often we go directly to a psychiatrist or psychologist. Sometimes we speak to a pastor, or we confide in a parent or a very close friend. As Christians we go particularly to God through prayers or meditating on God's Word. From this view, there is no particular road or no lone right direction to healing, but there are many potentially useful destinations and pathways to reach healing. Likewise, Fa'a-Samoa is not the only road to reach self-actualization but it has many potentially positive cultural and religious dynamics to enable persons to reach wholeness. It helps the Samoan mind to function more fully and to deal with emotional distress. Fa'a-Samoa is a medicine of the mind-body-soul.<sup>2</sup>

I have since the beginning of my theological studies learned, both in my ministry and most particularly in my own journey and struggle to be whole, that my understanding of God is culturally based. I can only make sense of who God is through the lens of Fa'a-Samoa. I have also learned that my spiritual growth and freedom depend in large part on my psychological health. Unless we deal with the forces that compel and drive us

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<sup>2</sup> Samoans do not think dualistically; their understanding of the human person is not dualistic but holistic. The human being is an integrated being—mind, soul, and body—and is connected to one another. To substantiate this perspective, modern scientific researches have been making surprising new discoveries, occasioning a new way of seeing. Their discoveries of the unity of body-mind-soul and of our relatedness to each other have not merely given us new facts, ideas, and theories, but are transforming our awareness.

backward, we will stay stuck and continue to be in psychological trouble, living uncomfortably.

I have found that most Samoan *faiʻfeau* rarely look at Fa'a-Samoa as psychotherapy as a means to revitalize their ministry. There is little recognition of the technicalities of the subject in dealing with troubled minds and souls. Often Samoan *faiʻfeau* spoke of the way in which the scriptures have offered immeasurable ways to heal souls. They spoke of the limitless resources which are at the church's disposal, especially in the person of Jesus Christ, in the realities of forgiveness and in the healing and support of the Christian church. However, no one has spoken about the value of Fa'a-Samoa in dealing with spiritual dilemmas. This chapter will bring out the dynamics of Fa'a-Samoa as psychotherapy; and illustrate the use of Fa'a-Samoa as a reconciliatory method for healing the Samoan mind-body-soul.<sup>3</sup>

#### Therapeutic Customs and Implications for Samoan Daily Living

The Fa'a-Samoan acceptance of the reality of the integration of the mind-body-soul will support the therapeutic journey to wholeness for Samoan daily living. It will also help us move away from the old dualistic thinking that harbors fragmentation (separation of mind, body, and soul). While Samoans are now situated between diverse religious and cultural traditions and belief systems, not including the fact that they suffer from a sense of confusion and meaninglessness, they experience the pull of conflict. Some feel life to

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<sup>3</sup> Before the birth of scientific revolution, the world was very much understood through the eyes of theology, and theology had already created its own dualism: the soul is higher; the body is inferior and subordinated to the soul, they were separate entities. Because of the fruits of scientific studies we now know that God did not create this world perfectly and had gone away letting the world run by itself according to absolute principles. We know more now the parts that make up the entire whole and our world in depth.

be useless while others are driven by compulsions or are controlled by fears.

Moreover, identification of Fa'a-Samoa and faithful participation in its lifeway and lifework fosters personal and interpersonal relationships which in turn further the health of mind-body-soul.<sup>4</sup> This cultural identification grounds the person as he/she continues the process of meaning making. This ground is a psychic strength.

Code of conduct and discipline urged by Fa'a-Samoa as leading to encouraging experiences in customary daily living is vital. The longevity of these Fa'a-Samoan codes and principles are of great psychological interest. They have come to form the basis not only for religious principles but also for much of the civil law in the Samoan community and culture. The authority of these codes, together with the belief that adherence to them will lead to successful living and harmony with all people, provides some basis for their endurance. The order that they bring becomes an inner, personal support and creates a communal, social support. These codes are the instructions for all Samoans to live by and to offer therapeutic and spiritual support for those in need.

Fa'a-Samoa as psychotherapy has many meanings within the context of Samoan spirituality. We talk of Samoans being in high spirits or low spirits. We talk of writing or speaking in the spirit of truth that will set us free. We talk of people or things being spirited away when they are moved quickly or unexpectedly from place to place. In sports, we even talk of Samoan football or rugby players putting up a spirited performance during a game, and of Samoans taking things in the right or in the wrong spirit.

Employed in this way, Fa'a-Samoa as psychotherapy stands primarily for energy,

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<sup>4</sup> Modern medicine has recognized the many connections between the body, mind, and emotions of persons and is moving toward a more holistic approach.

what Samoans regard as *malosi*. The Samoan notion of *malosi* is defined by the Samoan Christians as the animating principle of a Samoan being, which links to the belief that God birthed the spirit of life into the Samoan mind, the inspiration, which lead into an energetic and strong physiological body.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the spirit in this Samoan sense means *o le ola o mea uma* (the life of all things) and the energy of *tagata lilo* (the inner self).<sup>6</sup> This spirit is the life-giving code sustaining Samoan existence, a reality that is not restricted in the body and soul but in the psychological mind as well.

The unique function of Fa'a-Samoa is to present constructive and encouraging cultural motifs that can be used by Samoan *faiifeau*, congregants alike, and also people who simply want to help themselves psychologically in a manner that addresses their spiritual concerns. In traditional Samoa, people performed this integrative role, applying the wisdom implicit in the Fa'a-Samoa religious traditions to the particular life problems of their families or people. Today, the Samoan church utilizes Fa'a-Samoan wisdom to help Samoans deal with their concrete, real life dilemmas. In this way, according to Matthew Schwartz and Kalman Kaplan, "loss...and grief...can be overcome after the trauma has lifted."<sup>7</sup> The lifting of trauma through the use of Fa'a-Samoa can help provide means by which Samoans are able to treat personal and emotional problems rather than allowing them to grow until they destroy the mind-body-soul.

For descriptive purposes, the therapeutic advantage of Fa'a-Samoa may be

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<sup>5</sup> Bert W. Mailo, Folauga Tupuola, Eketone Tosi. Discussion with author, 3 Sep. 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Teleso Satele, discussion with author, 20 Aug. 2006. Satele is an Interfaith Chaplain at the Methodist Hospital, Arcadia, California. It must be admitted that many of Satele's theological insights and experience as a chaplain gained from his work has helped the author to rethink and reevaluate his own theological position and argument.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew B. Schwartz and Kalman J. Kaplan, Biblical Stories for Psychotherapy and Counseling: A Sourcebook (New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2004), 161.

presented. As I had mentioned earlier, the Samoan community shares a common vision that is supported by theological understanding and nurtured by psychological and Fa'a-Samoan spiritual practices. Using therapeutic foundations of Fa'a-Samoa as a basis for psychotherapy is important. When Samoans make mistakes and commit sins, which can harm their relationship with others and especially with God, Fa'a-Samoa requires the individual to have a feeling of guilt over his failings. God realizes that that person is imperfect; whereas Fa'a-Samoa recognizes that he/she must surrender and allow him/her the opportunity to restore his/her offense by means of *ifoga*.<sup>8</sup>

### *Ifoga* – Psychology of Reconciliation

The *ifoga* is so Samoan and unique in its operation and rationale. It is a ceremony in which an apology in the Fa'a-Samoa is offered; a public apology is rendered to the injured person and his or her family. It involves extended family and villages rather than individuals. The offense may have been carried out by an individual upon another individual (which is often the case), but it includes and involves more than just those individuals. *Ifoga* is commonly known by the Samoan people as a therapeutic reconciliatory act. Literally, it means “the act of bowing down” to show humility and to admit one’s wrongdoing. The psychology behind initiating an *ifoga* after an offense has been committed is so that retribution is avoided and peace maintained in the family or village community.

This process is considered by Kenneth Pargament as “forgive and forget...a form

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<sup>8</sup> The word *ifoga* originates from the Samoan word *ifo*, “to bow down to someone.” To bow in Samoa signifies attitude of respect and reverence for those in leadership or the elders. For a detailed discussion of *ifoga*, see a research by Leilani Tuala-Warren, *A Study into the Ifoga: Samoa’s Answer to Dispute Healing* (Auckland, NZ: Te Matahauariki Institute, 2002), 16.

of excuse or pardon for misdeeds.”<sup>9</sup> Rye also considers it a form of forgiveness which involves action; attempts are made to change ways of thinking, feeling, and relating.<sup>10</sup> Both of these claims reflect in the Fa’a-Samoa mentality of forgiveness for performing *ifoga*. Even if the person does not feel especially forgiving, he or she is still likely to act that way. With changes in behavior, changes in feeling may follow. To extend good will to the victim’s family may be the most challenging act of all, although the feeling of shame is intense.

Shame is a collective feeling in Samoa. It is a major factor that underlies the practice of *ifoga*. The intimacy of the extended family in Samoa is probably without parallel; when one member of a family commits a wrong, the whole family is involved. The extended family of the offender rallies to perform a therapeutic ceremony which humbles the offender and his/her family. In a sense, the individual offender becomes lost within the family or rather is shielded by the collective shield, which is his or her family.

Familial solidarity is not just a meaningless phrase in Samoa. A natural by-product of the concept of the *ifoga* is that it has the effect of bringing the members of the extended family closer together after the member of one family has committed a wrong upon a member of another family. According to Chief Gafatasi, it would be difficult to participate in an *ifoga* either as a member of the family making or receiving the apology without feeling the bonds of family solidarity.<sup>11</sup> The success of *ifoga* will not be experienced by both families if unity is not present. Samoa stresses family unity as a way

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<sup>9</sup> Kenneth I. Pargament, The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 260.

<sup>10</sup> M. S. Rye, Forgiveness and Mental Health: An Integration of Philosophy, Religion, and Psychology (Cleveland: Bowling Green State, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Discussion with author, 20 Mar. 2006.

to maintain healthy relationships and uphold Fa'a-Samoan values.

Understanding the significance of family within Fa'a-Samoa puts the *ifoga* into meaningful perspective. In Fa'a-Samoa, a crime committed against an individual is an insult to that individual's entire family. Corruption of the blood is the traditional law of the land. It means punishment of the criminal's innocent relatives. Before missionaries, retaliation for a crime was carried out against any member of the family of the criminal, and not merely against the criminal himself. This view of responsibility for crime gave rise to the *ifoga*. The Samoan view of responsibility for crime and the traditional methods of punishment and forgiveness reflected a policy liking for a society designed to provoke family pressure upon individuals to behave according to social norms.

Realizing the severity of *ifoga*, one of the most significant concepts in the Fa'a-Samoa is this one of the *va* (relationship). Samoans conduct their lives according to the unwritten principles of *va* which in its simplest form means, the maintenance of relationships between people, families, villages, districts, and between the people themselves and God. The emphasis of relationship (*va*) is far more optimistic. It encourages Samoans to hope and teaches that day-to-day efforts have a purpose and meaning. The Bible teaches that God created the world in a spirit of harmony and kindness, and this spirit has not changed. Samoans can work with their problems and can make their own lives and our world better. We cannot change the world outside of us, but we can change the world inside us—the psychological world.

Significantly, the *ifoga* is used chiefly to stop further any violence from occurring after an offense or wrongdoing has been committed. It is the most effective way of curbing any anger from the family of the victim. However, there still exists the fear of

revenge motivation in spite of the *ifoga*. Coupled with this is the need to maintain the *va* or connection with others. There is the need to protect not only the *aiga* of the offender but most crucially the offender themselves. An accepted *ifoga* means that the incident will never again be mentioned by either *aiga*. The decision of their *matai* to accept the *ifoga* will be treated with utmost respect. The *ifoga* party is able to carry on knowing that they have been forgiven, and that there is no longer any ill feeling towards them.<sup>12</sup>

From what has been discussed, Fa'a-Samoa as psychotherapy works between the Samoan mind and divine consciousness. It helps us to make choices between life paths, to place our actions and our lives in a more meaningful situation, and to "plug us into meaning and value in an accessible way, causes us to strive...gives us a sense of purpose, a sense of context."<sup>13</sup> In other words, it gives the individual the opportunity to alter current thoughts about his present situation, to re-contextualize his understanding of it, to address problems and seek higher meanings in life so it can transform both the self and life in positive ways.

There is no doubt that the structures of Samoan thinking which they include in the therapeutic and reconciling ceremony of *ifoga* activate those areas of the brain associated

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<sup>12</sup> The most recent case of *ifoga* was performed by the entire county on behalf of the deceased Hon. Luagalau Levaula Kamu. One of the issues that made the most important headlines in Samoa in the period from July 1994 to June 1995 was the murder of the Minister of Public Works, Hon. Luagalau Levaula Kamu, in the Independent State of Samoa. The *ifoga* was performed by the entire district of Malie, Western Samoa when former Minister of Public Works of Samoa was assassinated by Eletise Leafa Vitale, 34, the son of Leafa Vitale who was previously Minister of Public Works and had been sacked from that position by Mr. Kamu. This was followed by a scandal involving accusations of embezzlement of public funds. Also involved in the plot was former Minister of Post and Telecommunication, Toi Aukuso and Leafa Vitale, both former employees of the government of Samoa. At 4:00 a.m. on a very cold morning, respected high chiefs and talking chiefs of the entire district of Malie covered with ie toga sat in front of the offended chief's house in Ululoloa, Savaii. The chiefs and the entire district were quickly called into the house by the chiefs of the village, and words of welcome and the process of reconciliation began. Moreli J. Niuatoa, paper on 201 Christian Ethics, Kanana Fou Theological Seminary, 12 Dec. 1995.

<sup>13</sup> Fontana, *Psychology*, 81.



with the “God spot.”<sup>14</sup> The main purpose of *ifoga* is that it results in improving and perfecting individual relationship; an act that focuses on human development as its goal. The value of understanding *ifoga* will help us appraise the psychological meaning of Fa’a-Samoan spiritual beliefs stressed in this study. If these beliefs appear to bring psychological benefits, it can be said that these beliefs are of important therapeutic values for wholeness. This allusion to Samoan ideology concerning reconciliation and improving individual relations is also echoed in the Fa’a-Samoan theory of sickness and death.

### Psychological Theories of Sickness and Death

As critical as *ifoga*, sickness is believed by the Samoans to be the result of the hatred of a ghost, a spell of the family *tupua* (deity) by a sister or a paternal aunt or other relative in the female side or group, possession by an angry ghost, the breaking of a *tapu*, or to some natural cause like eating rotten fish, long exposure in the sun or rain, or a disease like *vae tupa* (elephantiasis). Samoans, who normally employ native practitioners and have nothing to do with modern medicine, believe in natural causes of sickness.

Samoan medicine is divided into two varieties: *vai aitu* (ghost medicine) used in cases of illness where a supernatural activity is suspected, and *vai* (ordinary medicine).<sup>15</sup> When possessed, the patient speaks with a strange voice and must be rubbed with *vai*

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<sup>14</sup> The term “God Spot” was coined by V. S. Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee to label the area of the temporal lobes which appears to evoke mystical-type experiences, in Phantoms in the Brain (London: Fourth Estate, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Ghost and ordinary medicine for ailments, treatment of wounds and skin surface ailments are infusions of the crushed leaves or scraped bark of Samoan medicinal plants. The juice from these leaves or barks are either drunk fresh or boiled and are sometimes applied to the wounds.

*aitu*. If the revenge of the family god is the suspected cause, then a confessional ‘*ava* ceremony is held. For any serious psychological illness, a doctor is called in.

On many occasions, the Samoan who falls ill makes the greatest effort to reach home. Death in a strange land, or even in a house not belonging to his family, is regarded with horror. The sick bed of a *matai* is attended by other chiefs and talking chiefs to provide psychotherapy and comfort. Children go home at once if a father or mother is ill, the entire household and descent group will be thoroughly disorganized by attendance on the *ma'i* (sick person).

In Fa'a-Samoa, at death, the spirit is supposed to escape through the mouth at the moment when breathing ceases.<sup>16</sup> The body is laid on a piece of *siapo* (bark-cloth) or *ie toga*, if the deceased is a person of rank. The death of a high chief is cried through the village by the sons of special talking-chiefs. The village *aumaga* will prepare the grave of the high chief supervised by a high talking chief. While all of these activities are in motion a senior talking chief of the village will consult with the family members, particularly the chief in charge of the funeral procession, regarding the burial service and other family responsibilities. On the other hand, the *faiifeau*, with the village choir, and staff will assume evening services and offer counseling for the family members of the deceased chief.

Another important phase of the service for the deceased is the preparation for burial. Many speeches are exchanged between the two families to acquire who will *totoo* (the final application of the cologne ointment on the face) on the deceased. In most cases, if it was a married man who died, then the wife will perform the *totoo*. If it is a

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<sup>16</sup> Leasau Eseroma, discussion with author, 23 Jul. 2005.

married woman, then the husband will do it. This is the tradition, considered by the Samoans as the final responsibility to the dead, to satisfy the deceased husband or wife of any wrongdoings by the family.

### Preparation of Corpse and Burial

The corpse is rubbed with *fanu'u* (sweet smelling ointment) mixed with coconut oil, laid upon a piece of *siapo* or *ie toga*, and fanned continuously.<sup>17</sup> The young men who are to dig the grave measure the corpse with a piece of *ofe* (bamboo). The grave is about six feet deep, four feet wide, and seven or eight feet long, and is usually dug a few feet away from the house. About four feet from the surface, a narrow shelf is left, and a smaller space just large enough for the body is hollowed out. Some graves are lined with flat-stones from the ocean, while others are covered only with a mat. Some bodies, especially those of men of rank are placed in old canoes, both ends of which have been chopped off to make canoe-shaped coffins. The body is wrapped in a piece of *siapo* or *ie toga*, which is first folded longitudinally, and then each end is doubled up. If the corpse is to be carried far, this *siapo* wrapping is secured with cord of *fau* bark.<sup>18</sup>

My discussion with some of the Olosega village traditional chiefs revealed that burial customs before the missionaries were different. They agreed that the ancient position of burial was flat on the back, hands clasped over breast or abdomen, and feet towards the rising sun. Also, some of them insisted upon a sitting burial, with palms

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<sup>17</sup> This Samoan custom is still practiced throughout the Samoan islands and in the mainstream of the United States. Although some of the Fa'a-Samoa customs are not performed due to the unavailability of natural objects, the essence of the Samoan burial custom is still maintained through other substitute means.

<sup>18</sup> Author's discussion with Pinefa'amau, Lo'a, Laautuvanu, Tautala, orators of the village of Olosega, 22 Feb. 2004.

pressed together between flexed knees.<sup>19</sup>

A discussion with the elder women of *fale lalaga* (weaving enterprise) in the village of Olosega revealed a different custom for the women. If the deceased is a pregnant woman or if the illness has been of some unsolved nature an autopsy is held in the open grave. The native surgeon stands across the corpse and cutting the body open takes out the fetus or searches for the diseased organ. The fetus is washed, wrapped in *siapo*, and buried with the mother. An organ believed to show signs of disease is taken away and burned. The *fanu'u* used in preparing the corpse are thrown into the grave. Large pieces of coral rock which have been carried up from the sea by the young men are quickly chiseled down so that they will fit loosely into the grave in a double layer.<sup>20</sup> Over these is scattered a basketful of coral rubble and then the grave is filled in. Remains on the grave of the chief are large stones piled in a loose and irregular rectangle.

It was the duty of the women to cover the new grave with coral rubble. For a chief this duty was performed by the whole *auluma* led by the *taupou*; and for someone of slight importance by the women and girls of the household. This was purely a woman's duty and no men might cross their path nor speak to them as, in single file, they carried baskets of rubble from the seashore to the grave.

According to Fa'avela Leatiota, occasionally a favorite child is buried in the house. It was a way to remember the deceased child mentally.<sup>21</sup> The frequent slight

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<sup>19</sup> Faimalo Pili Letuli, Toilolo, Poloai, discussion with author, 22 Feb. 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Fa'avela, Muli'au, Taunuuga, Fiamaua, Fanua, discussion with author, 10 Jan. 2004.

<sup>21</sup> In the old Samoa, children were often buried inside the *fale*, under the three center-pillars. This was to remind the family, especially the mother, of the life of the child. Psychologically, the child was believed to be alive by talking to him/her whenever someone is alone at home. Elders of the household were usually the people who do this all the time. Today, Samoa young generation has no knowledge of this

shifting of house sites upon a small piece of land often brought the grave under the center posts. This seems to be the source of human bones found under house posts. There is no record of human sacrifice connected with house building.<sup>22</sup>

Stair reported that there were other forms of burial reported in Western Samoa, a platform burial, and mummification.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, there is a separate burial of the skulls of chiefs.<sup>24</sup> The Manu'a chiefs reported nothing concerning this type of burial custom in the Manu'a islands. However, they unveiled a Fa'a-Samoa way of mourning for the dead.

### Samoan Psychology of Bereavement

Manu'a is noted for the restraint and dignity of its funeral customs in contrast to Tutuila and Upolu, where an *ausoga* (ceremonial destruction of property) accompanied by obscenity marked important funerals. For any important death, the *aumaga*, or the *auluma*, if the deceased were a woman of rank, came in shifts and sang. The death *pese aualofa* (chants) have all been displaced by Christians hymns, and the choirs have taken the responsibility of singing for the dead. The exchange of property at a funeral did not follow quite the ordinary lines. Often many gifts were returned to their owners (the families of both sides) while the food was being consumed at the feast.<sup>25</sup>

*A lagi* (funeral ceremony) in which *ie toga* were distributed to the talking chiefs

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custom because it has no longer existed. Fa'avela Leatiota, discussion with author, 10 Jan. 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Discussion with author, 10 Jan. 2004.

<sup>23</sup> J. B. Stair, "O le Fale ole Fe'e," *Polynesian Society*, vol. 3 (1894): 239-44.

<sup>24</sup> Stairs, *Old Samoa*, 178-179. It must be noted that a similar burial custom was reported by the elders of the village of Fagaitua (eastern side of Tutuila). The chiefs were beheaded, their bodies are buried in front of their homes while the heads are buried on the top of the mountain called *Mauga o Alii* (Mountain of Chiefs).

<sup>25</sup> Utagamamao M. Niuatoa, discussion with author, 22 Dec. 2005, San Francisco, California.

was supposed to be given for the kings alone, but the practice seems to have varied. In Tutuila *ie toga* and *siapo* offerings were always brought to a funeral of a chief. These materials, after burial, will be redistributed to the families and those who have come to give personal and emotional support.

If there was to be a *lagi* it was held immediately after the burial. No fires might be lit at a high chief's death, except ceremonial fires to light the house during the night on which the corpse lay in the house, if the death feast was postponed until the next day. To this feast relatives and talking chiefs contributed food. Mutilation and blood letting *o le fa'aaloalo o le 'eleele* (courtesy in blood), were practiced, but details have been forgotten.<sup>26</sup>

Fear of demon body snatchers sometimes moved relatives to spend three or four nights on the grave of the beloved dead person. Offerings of food are said to have been rarely placed on a grave. According to Chief Leasau, this custom is still visible today in some of the remote islands of Samoa.<sup>27</sup> When a suspected member is believed to be possessed by the spirit of a passed-relative, a *matai* of the family will have to speak to the grave on behalf of the ill-person, early morning before daylight. It is their belief that when matters are made straight with the dead relatives things are going to be alright.<sup>28</sup>

The Samoans believed they have a psychological connection with the deceased

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<sup>26</sup> Pinefa'amau Mata'u, discussion with author, 19 Jun. 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Discussion with author, 17 Aug. 2005.

<sup>28</sup> This is a common activity in Samoa. It must be noted that it is also practiced here in the United States. When a family member is ill and has proved to be possessed by the spirit of a deceased relative (which is often found to be the case), the chief and elders of the family will speak to the dead relative regarding any unsettled matters between the family and the deceased. In most cases, it is the unfulfilled will of the deceased to be taken to Samoa or to his/her family to lay to rest there which caused the ailment of a family member.

family members. It was that reason which inspires and invokes in them the belief of *mana* (spiritual power). When one has *mana*, he has the ability to foresee future outcomes, to examine spirit-possessed illness and recommend treatment or a remedy for a prolonged illness. Today, only few Samoans practice it because they believe it is contrary to their Christian beliefs.

Today, Samoans have abandoned various traditions related to mourning, sickness, and death due to their strong beliefs and faith in God. Nevertheless, they have still embraced the practices and traditions of healing and treatment employing Samoan natural resources. They still believe that their strength and wisdom is the integration of their religious beliefs and Fa'a-Samoa.

#### Psychology of Samoan Herbal Medicine and Treatment

Primitive Samoans believed in numerous gods. The gods were thought to bring affliction or tragedy upon people who would not live according to their wishes. Samoans also believed in ghosts who could bring chaos and misfortune upon an individual, family or people. Even now, many Samoans believe that a punishment in the form of a disease can come upon a family for an ungodly way of living.<sup>29</sup>

Dealing with critical illness, especially of those believed to be ghost possessed, is not easy. Often we may know there is something physically wrong, but still have to play out the inner struggle that also exists in the person's psyche for the person's benefit. Hands-on experience of Samoan healers allows a kind of wisdom that cannot be transmitted through the body alone but through the mind. Therefore, we must allow

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<sup>29</sup> Conversation with some of the older women in the village of Sili disclosed this same belief, that illness and bad luck are curses from the gods for not being happy with them. 13 Mar. 2004.

ourselves to enter situations that we do not fully comprehend and must trust that there is a higher meaning to what we do. Toese Tafili drew little meaning from his Fa'a-Samoan efforts to reframe his situation regarding the death of her 73-year old father, Mata'u Tafili. To the notion that God planned for good to come out of the loss, Tafili speaks:

*Afai o tofotofo tatou e le Atua, ua tatau ona ia iloa o tatou uma ua le pasia lea suega...Sa ou taumafai lava e ala i la'u Fa'a-Samoa e fa'a-talitonu lo'u mafaufau e le moni le oti, e leai se mea, a o se ala ua saunia e le Atua i lona malo e fa'avavau mo tatou uma.<sup>30</sup>*

If God is testing us he must know by now that many of us fail the test...I try to persuade myself through Fa'a-Samoa that death is not real, does not really exist, but is a way prepared by God for us to enter his kingdom.

Like Toese, many Samoans may find Fa'a-Samoan attempts to transform negative situations in a more positive light far from persuasive. There are, however, other ways to shift views on the world and our place in it.

Confronted with situations like this, it may be more reasonable to change the way we think about people in the situation than about God or the situation itself. The psychological diagnosis of Samoan illness or catastrophes evidently proved that many times Samoans think that God had betrayed us. They felt betrayed by a God they had assumed would be on their side in times of death or struggle. An actual case is important here.

While in residence at the Kanana Fou Theological Seminary, my wife was diagnosed as being possessed by the spirit of Tuiatua.<sup>31</sup> I was saddened. I didn't believe

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<sup>30</sup> Testimony at the Sunday funeral service, United Samoan Church, Carson, 6 Aug. 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Tuiatua is one of the ancient Samoan deities who traveled throughout Samoa, known as "king of the gods" (*Tui*, meaning "king" and *atua*, meaning "god"). He is fond of beautiful women and possessed them as his wives. Many Samoan women are still possessed by Tuiatua's spirit today.



this happened in a seminary, a place that was supposedly a “holy ground” for the training of future Samoan church leaders. So we took her to a Samoan healer. She’d admitted that it was Tuiatua. Caught up with this worrisome experience, I felt sadness towards God for allowing this to happen to my wife. But my wife kept saying that I should not blame God for what happened to her. She said she would be okay. Fa’a-Samoa has ways to deal with the *ma’i aitu* (ghostly possessed).<sup>32</sup>

The problem was not that God had betrayed us or allowed this to happen. We did not focus on our discontent or sadness but on the loving presence of God in all circumstances (Rom. 8:38-39). God would have liked for us to follow a different path. God allows us freedom to choose our ways of healing. Samoans recognize that the reframing of our minds is usefully constructive. Fa’a-Samoan herbal medicine and natural treatments are also considered helpful. They provide the possibility of recovery through the employment of Fa’a-Samoan rituals which provide healing to return the person to a better path.

There were detailed accounts made by the missionaries about Samoan healing although their descriptions may have been biased because of the conflict between the rituals and the missionaries’ understanding of these within a stern Christian framework. The missionaries were not really familiar with this aspect of Samoan culture. Other authors in the 1800s noted some Samoan medical practices, most notably the British Consul to Samoa, William Pritchard, and three missionaries—George Turner (1861), Samuel Ella (1892), and John Stair (1897)—but again, there is little mention in these of

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<sup>32</sup> While I was afraid and worried about what had happened to my wife, she kept encouraging me that I am a strong Samoan who has firm roots in the Fa’a-Samoa. I should not be worried. Fa’a-Samoa has ways of dealing with *ma’i aitu*. High chief Ulufale, the chief who my wife was referred to and was related to Tuiatua, uttered his Samoan chants and prayed for my wife. Ever since then my wife was well again. Jul. 1994.

herbal medicines. A summary of what was known about Samoan medicine was written by Augustin Kramer in his monumental work called *Die Samoa Inseln* (The Samoa Islands, 1902-1903). Kramer gave details about 84 remedies he recorded during his work on the islands in the 1890s.

Samoans use traditional medicine for any type of sickness or illness. For example, an elder woman will use *lau ti* (tea leaves) or *lau nonu* (morinda leaves)<sup>33</sup> with water to massage the head of a person with a headache. Samoan treatment is thought to have no side effects because it relies on the use of herbs, roots and leaves. Usually, Samoan medication needs to be applied twice in order to see any change. If it is not effective, the family will take the sick person to another Samoan *fofo* (traditional physician).

W. Whistler conducted research on Samoan herbal medicine and reported that “ancient [Samoan] man found that ingestion or application of certain herbs and barks were effective in treating some of the ailments that plagued him.”<sup>34</sup> Whistler also claimed that “illness is a retribution for some transgression against the village, the family, or the spirits.”<sup>35</sup> Turner also found that the Samoans supposed disease to be caused by the wrath of some deity; their main desire was not for medicine, but to learn the

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<sup>33</sup> The *nonu* fruit is used by many Samoans as a unique soap with traditional healing effect. Nonu is the most widely used medicinal plant in Polynesia and is part of many medicinal treatments in Samoa. The Matuaileoo Environmental Trust Inc., (METI) is beginning a clinical trial to look at testimonial reports of successful treatment of baby rashes, skin irritation, itch and insect bites and is offering free samples to patients referred by their physicians with skin disorders. Samoan *fofo* and chief Ulufale, discussion with author, 26 Feb. 1994.

<sup>34</sup> W. Arthur Whistler, *Samoan Herbal Medicine: O Laau ma Vai Fofo o Samoa* (Honolulu: Isle Botanica, 1996). Whistler also claimed that Samoan herbal medicine can be traced back to the pre-historic period.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

psychological cause of the illness.<sup>36</sup>

Pritchard also noted that:

All diseases were held to be the visitations of the displeasure of some god, and when any one became ill, the first thing done was to consult the village priest, and through him to propitiate the offended deity.<sup>37</sup>

Ella likewise noted that:

Sickness and death were viewed by the Samoans as proceeding from the anger of their tutelary deities, or produced by an evil spirit, or by the spirit of a dead relative entering the body of the victim.<sup>38</sup>

All of these accounts are similar, but it is uncertain whether they are three separate accounts, or if one or both of the latter two were based on the first. However, the *fofo* who do the healing were not even mentioned by any of the writers. Here also, the writers were not really familiar with the ancient herbal medicine of Samoa because traditional healers require some psychology of Fa'a-Samoa in order to correctly assess the illness and in order to make a diagnosis and prognosis. With such beliefs that attribute internal ailments to supernatural powers rather than natural origins, the use of medicinal plants would have been the only means for curing and pleasing the sad deities.

Herbal and medicinal treatments are popular psychological skills in Samoa. The process of selecting someone to pass the healing art on to is very informal. Apprentices are selected on the basis of good character (such as unselfishness, compassion, or religious commitment), the ability to learn plants and remedies, and the intellectual capacity for being a Samoan healer. The most important skill of being a Samoan healer

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<sup>36</sup> Turner, *Nineteen Years*, 46.

<sup>37</sup> W. T. Pritchard, *Polynesian Reminiscences* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1866), 128.

<sup>38</sup> Samuel Ella, "Samoa," in *Polynesian and Melanesian Ethnology* (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, 1893), 620-45.

is the psychological diagnosis of an ailment. Wrongful diagnosing will lead to hurtful consequences.

Diagnosing a patient involves a discussion of the symptoms of the illness. If the illness is of uncertain origin, such as abdominal pains or an ailment that goes on for a long time without lessening, then the healer may question the patient to determine if there is some social cause; for example, whether there is some interpersonal dispute that is causing the ailment or hindering the cure.

The psychotherapeutic capacity of Fa'a-Samoa is important both in Samoa and in the United States. The health of the soul and mind is the chief concern of Fa'a-Samoa. As we have seen throughout this study, Fa'a-Samoa mediates important therapeutic cultural values which are significant for both psychological and physical healing. These values are essentially important to the enriching of Samoan spirituality.

In modern Samoa, as in the time of Jesus, people long for a profound change and they look to Fa'a-Samoa for help: Samoan healers for their bodies, *faiifeau* for their souls. On the other hand, because doctors, psychologists, and medical researchers are beginning to share information and to understand other cultures, their perceptions and assumptions are changing. Fa'a-Samoa as psychotherapy is on the brink of beginning to respond to people's need in a new, non-dualistic manner.

Shaped by this Fa'a-Samoan cultural experience of healing and treatment, or generated through a more creative process, Samoans can come to value a practical set of important objects. They may be material (tree bark, leaves, coconut shell), physical (health, fitness, or appearance), psychological (comfort, meaning, growth), social (intimacy, social justice), and spiritual (closeness with God, religious experience). Along

these lines, some theorists like Maslow, Murray and Erikson proposed multiple objects of significance.

Maslow believed that people pursue a hierarchy of needs, including physical ones, safety, love, self-esteem, and self-actualization.<sup>39</sup> Murray outlines 20 needs that direct behavior, including the need for achievement, the need for autonomy, the need for affiliation, the need for order, and the need for respect.<sup>40</sup> Erikson saw the issues of greatest meaning changing as identity developed through the stages of the lifespan.<sup>41</sup>

These theorists, together with Fa'a-Samoa, suggest that there is no single common object of importance. It may be more accurate to say that the significance<sup>42</sup> Samoans seek is made up of a system of objects, an organization of values. We can speak of significance or values as something momentous, something that really matters. What really matters and is meaningful is the Fa'a-Samoan paradigm involving important feelings and beliefs interrelated with community wholeness. Today's Samoan faith community conduct rites of passage programs for Fa'a-Samoa as a way to motivate them toward excellence in physical, social, psychological and spiritual well-being.

### Samoan Community of Fa'a-Samoa: Our Absolute Psychological Resource

Samoan religious educators should not work in such an individualistic way and

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<sup>39</sup> Abraham Maslow, Motivation and Personality (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1954).

<sup>40</sup> Henry A. Murray, et al., Explorations in Personality: A Clinical and Experimental Study of Fifty Men of College Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938).

<sup>41</sup> Erik Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle (New York: Norton, 1980).

<sup>42</sup> Here, significance refers to a circumstance construct involving feelings and beliefs associated with worth, importance, and value. It embodies the experience of caring, attraction, or attachment.

stay isolated from the community. Religious educators have many human resources and multiple relationships with those who come to the church and relationships with those outside the church. Because most of those who come to us as religious educator are known to us through our leadership in their religious or secular community, we are never simply an objective. Unlike other health professions who first meet with their clients in consultation and draw out case studies from strangers, we often know those who come to us for spiritual or psychological help.

According to Margaret Kornfeld, “Authentic community is the ‘medicine’ our society needs.”<sup>43</sup> Samoa is always community oriented. Both the congregation and the *fai'feau* are rooted in the same ground of Fa'a-Samoa because we are sustained by the same community. We both draw upon our Fa'a-Samoa, our Samoan “well” and resources of the Samoan faith community. The well in which we dig is made up of many different types and compositions of “minerals.” Our cultural and religious values and motifs are remarkable. They each flourish in the water of our Fa'a-Samoa traditions. Although the water—the religio-cultural traditions—differs, its function is the same in all our Fa'a-Samoa, where it nurtures, supports, and empowers. As we understand more about how Samoan community works, we are able both to cultivate the “well” and to support by the “water.”

Samoans find healing in community because we have witnessed such healing. Often Samoans know that isolation and a sense of meaninglessness are the usual complaints when asking for help. Some of these complaints are accompanied by symptoms of psychological disorders that can be treated by herbal medicine. One of the

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<sup>43</sup> Margaret Kornfeld, Cultivating Wholeness: A Guide to Care and Counseling in Faith Communities (New York: Continuum, 1998), 16.

most important contributions the Samoan community of faith makes to Samoans with mental or spiritual problems is to give persons a sense that they are important because they are God's children.

### Summary

I have pointed out that Fa'a-Samoa forming alliances with psychology cannot be denied. I have also argued that we cannot practice Fa'a-Samoa as psychotherapy to illustrate its therapeutic fullness and essence if we lack understanding of our own cultural and religious values. It is therapeutically significant to instill into the minds of the Samoans the positive idea of health, confident faith, and expectations of recovery. In many cases, faith and courage are the pivotal elements on which a cure depends.

In terms of illness, resignation to serious illness may be the determining factor in premature death; the will to live may be the decisive element in recovery of health. The attitudes of the person toward himself, his family, and his God may condition the issue of life or death. Faith in Fa'a-Samoa as psychotherapy may be the victory. We have seen that in the performance of the Samoan ritual of *ifoga*. The psychology of *ifoga* has been equated with reconciliation, a way to restore a relationship. It is a protective method, from Samoa, designed to limit the pain and hurt of further injustice. Fa'a-Samoa as psychotherapy helps transform the Samoan mind to gain a sense of personal worth. To say that someone has sinned does not mean that he or she is worthless or hopeless.

As I have pointed out, Fa'a-Samoa is an object of significance in the lifeway of Samoa. Regular involvement in the Fa'a-Samoa system of religious beliefs and cultural practices can have naturally preventive consequences. Fa'a-Samoa teaches Samoans to

avoid high-risk behaviors. For example, avoiding the breaking of a *tapu* or “eating rotten fish long exposed in the sun or rain” will reduce your chance of getting sick or possessed by a ghost. Other pastoral care literature may conflict with this and we are not creating a connection about these things in this chapter but looking only at one claim that connects some aspects of Fa’a-Samoa with healing.

Finally, Fa’a-Samoa as psychotherapy is the remedy for the Samoan psychological struggles. It inherently mediates significant reconciliatory cultural values which are important in mending broken relationships. It is the only source of mental or spiritual support in the Samoan faith community besides the love of *aiga* and village, and especially the love of God.



## CONCLUSION

I started this study with a story about my daughter's struggle to regain the trust of her friends at school. Fortunately, she has regained and mended her relationship with her friends. Similarly, this study is precisely finding ways to mend the break between Fa'a-Samoa and spirituality. Attempts were made to present a holistic approach crucial for mending the Fa'a-Samoan values with Christian perspectives in order to make new meanings for the Samoan Christians in new times and circumstances.

Christian values are integrated and interwoven with the indigenous experiences of the Samoans, drawing mostly on local concepts and expressions, in an attempt to expose them spiritually in order to bring the God-Gospel home. It is the hope that understanding of Fa'a-Samoa may be a way of embracing the real spiritual dimension of faith in response to God's caring love for the whole creation. While exploring the transvaluation of Fa'a-Samoa, awareness to the reality of God and the certainty of life is affirmed.

One must not forget that change in someone's life—whether it is social, economic, or political—is always a change in one's spiritual life as well. Spiritual reality is always a part of our humanity. The economic and cultural dynamic of material wealth is an impulse in the transforming and enriching of contemporary Samoan spirituality. Because of the superior and dominant role these dynamics have perpetuated on the Samoans, religious educators in the Samoan church must find ways to balance the teaching of Fa'a-Samoa and globalized spirituality.<sup>1</sup>

The Fa'a-Samoan life is essentially a spiritual life. In a sense, Fa'a-Samoa is a

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<sup>1</sup> I am referring to the economic and cultural dynamic of globalism that is transforming the world we live in at an unprecedented pace. This sweeping change in the world today determines what sort of spirituality we will leave to our children and grandchildren, and what its impact on our spiritual lives is.

“gospel” made visible. While the Gospel leads us to eternal life, Fa’a-Samoa leads us to a good life. The Fa’a-Samoa which we teach, preach and live is not merely a written or spoken message, it is the whole content of the lived Samoan Christian faith; the knowledge of Christ which we seek is not merely the assimilation of certain facts about Him, but knowledge won by experience of Him. An enlightened mind is the first prerequisite for a strong Samoan soul, but enlightenment is not life, though it is an important part of it. The Samoan Christian life is enlightened by instruction and by the practicing and applying of these instructions to one’s life every moment he or she exists and is blessed by the grace of God.

Fa’a-Samoa is a big part of the Samoan spiritual lifeway. It is steeped in a complex set of social hierarchies, courtesies and customs that regulate all dimensions of public and private life. Fa’a-Samoa is based on the *matai* system of government, with a chief responsible for an entire family. The family works on extended socialist principles with wealth and food being distributed according to everyone’s need, and honors social standing is shouldered by all members of the family. To sustain the effectiveness of Fa’a-Samoa, the Samoan values and beliefs must be transvalued into new horizons of spiritual meaning and perspectives. These values must be reevaluated to see how they have influenced the Samoan perspective on life, their global commitment, their relationships, and their spirituality. Doing this faithfully will essentially make Fa’a-Samoa meaningful to them.

I want to reemphasize networking of family members for the benefit of the entire group. Sharing of the basic values of Samoan spirituality—love, respect, and forgiveness should be the most important guiding principle for the Samoans. These values must be

shared with other members of the family and church. Love is the concept of giving, receiving and sharing of gifts that qualifies most Samoan ideals. *Fa'aaloalo* or respect is the basis of good healthy relationships which binds together every Samoans. *Ifoga* or forgiveness allows a Samoan to return to the right relational arrangement after a wrong has been committed. The Samoan church as family and village here in the United States is one's refuge, a sanctuary for all Samoans.

I have found that the problem of Samoan spirituality is how it exemplifies its relationship, union, and compliance with the Spirit of God that one experiences through one's reception of God's grace. "To walk according to the Spirit" (Rom. 6) is an exact way to describe the spiritual undergirding Fa'a-Samoa. This relationship with the Spirit is made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and practical through the vehicles of Fa'a-Samoa.

Foundational to the above expression of spirituality is the affirmation that every Samoan has spirituality because every person has some awareness of and relationship with that which transcends their own personal experience. Whether the transcendent is encountered through religious experience, an academic dialogue with a friend, by playing with your child or singing in a church choir, everyone is spiritually created and constantly involved in the purpose of life. For some this awareness and relationships are more developed, while others believe they are only hints of that which transcends their personal experience.

I suggest that rather than approaching the Bible as a particular message appropriate for the Samoan context, it must be humbly approached as a product of socially and culturally conditioned religious experience coming out of the very life of the

Hebrew people and early Christian community. Moreover, rather than understanding Christian doctrines and traditions as directly inspired words from heaven, Fa'a-Samoa should look at doctrines as conditioned by various cultural, social, and political concerns of Western Europe. The metaphor of the coconut is an example. The coconut has several layers that must be husked in order to get to the meat of the coconut. The outer layer is the *pulu* (husk fiber)—and refers to the European culture that brought the gospel to Samoa; it must be husked in order to get to the *atigipopo* (shell)—the culture of the biblical authors. The shell must be cracked to get to the *niu* (kernel)—the “meat” or heart of God’s revelation to the Israelites, the Gospel. This Gospel must be planted into Fa'a-Samoa soil (culture) in order to grow and bear fruits. It must be explained in a culture and conceptual patterns that have already flourished and been understood in Fa'a-Samoa. It must be communicated and practiced in ways already familiar to the Samoans. If not, then it will die.

When these outward layers are completely husked, then we look for God’s revelation and self-manifestations, within Fa'a-Samoan values, relational patterns, and the concerns of the Samoan people. Out of this comes authentic Samoan spirituality, a constant search to understand God within the values and dynamics of Fa'a-Samoa.

### Recommendations for Further Study

First, this model needs to be put to the test in Samoan congregations to see how effective it is in nurturing Samoan spirituality through the use of Fa'a-Samoa. Because of the common misperception that contemplation and action are contrary, Samoan congregations tend to fall toward one or the other, with an emphasis on prayer and moral

living, or a distinct movement toward practicing of Fa'a-Samoa. Some Samoan congregations have developed educational programs, but few have intentionally sought to integrate Samoan spirituality and Fa'a-Samoa. When Samoan pastoral leadership is committed to a holistic Samoan spirituality there is a great potential for its acceptance by members of the congregation. Even without the *fai'feau's* support, small groups of persons carefully seeking to integrate nurture and action can have a tremendous effect on the congregation as a whole. When Samoan spirituality is practiced in a congregation, additional field-based study is needed to see what allows it to take hold and grow in Samoan communities of faith.

Second, a more profound comparison is needed for the understanding of Samoan spirituality presented in this study and Fa'a-Samoa which exists in other, more conservative traditions. How do conservative Samoan Christians conceive of their Samoan spirituality? How do their theological and philosophical underpinnings differ from my own? I noted earlier that the inclination to unite spirituality and Fa'a-Samoa seem to require willingness to be in dialogue with others. The one entering into the dialogue does not need to ascribe to an ideology which accepts other perspectives as equally valid as their own, but this fact does not diminish the value of a person's dual engagement with Fa'a-Samoa and spirituality.

And lastly, there is a need to profoundly study the ordinary lives of Samoans who seek to live Samoan spirituality engaged with Fa'a-Samoa. I use the word "ordinary" to designate the average but extraordinary people who are quietly and consistently living lives of spiritual nurture.

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